LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

PARSHAS ACHAREI-KEDOSHIM

BY

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ESSAYS ON PARSHAS ACHAREI-KEDOSHIM

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Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

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B"H

INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Acharei-Kedoshim* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

> "The time of your Redemption has arrived."

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the

capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *Galus*/exile mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

* * *

The twin Parshiyos of Acharei and Kedoshim contain the fundamental Mitzvah of Ahavas Yisroel-Love of Your fellow. Since our Galus=exile was initiated by the Jewish people's behavior contrary to this "great

principle of Torah, the final Redemption occurs when we rectify the division within the Jewish community.

However, as the Rebbe pointed out, our focus should be less on rectifying the past, for that we have already done, but more on preparing for and living with the dynamics of the future. Jewish love and unity is the way we prepare for and live with Moshiach and redemption!

ESSAY ONE

I DON'T NEED YOUR GOLD, I WANT YOUR SOUL

Gold is a metaphor for spiritual wealth.

In conventional times and situations one must search for and offer our "gold" to G-d.

In unconventional times, like Yom Kippur, we must transcend the "gold standard."

We must give our pure untainted and unadorned souls to G-d.

ESSAY ONE

I DON'T NEED YOUR GOLD, I WANT YOUR SOUL

The Torah has Pity on Our Money

In this week's parsha the Torah details the manner in which Aaron—and all subsequent High Priests—were to perform the service on Yom Kippur. Normally the Kohain Gado-High Priestl would wear golden vestments. However for the special service that involved his entry into the Holy of Holies (the inner precinct of the Sanctuary) on Yom Kippur he would wear white linen garments.

One would have imagined that precisely when the holiest Jew (the Kohain Gadol) enters into the holiest place on earth (the Holy of Holies) on the holiest day of the year (Yom Kippur) that he should wear the most precious and ornate garments. Why then was he commanded to remove them and, instead, only to wear the plain white linen garments?

The Talmud and Midrash anticipated this question and responded to it in two ways. The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 26a) invokes the legal principle:

> "*Ain kateigor na'aseh saneigor*-a prosecutor cannot become the defender."

In other words the Kohain Gadol's service was to atone for the sin of the golden calf in addition to other sins. Vestiges of that sin still continue centuries after the original incident of the golden calf and, in fact, will only be removed with the coming of Moshiach in the era of the final Redemption. And since gold was the source of their transgression, wearing golden vestments would have aroused the incriminating memory of that tragic sin.

Gold is compared to a prosecutor because it is what caused this most heinous transgression. It could therefore not serve as a source of atonement for that very sin; it cannot become the "defender."

The Midrash adds another answer to this question as to why the Kohain Gadol would not wear his golden vestments when entering the holy of holies:

> "The Torah has pity on the money of the Jewish people."

This answer is puzzling. Using the logic of "the Torah having pity for the money of the Jewish people" one might have argued that it should not have been worn at all throughout the year. So why is it that on the one day when it would seem most appropriate to use the most exquisite of the garments was it denied?

Furthermore the Kohain Gadol did, in fact, wear the golden vestments on Yom Kippur. Only when he entered the Holy of Holies he was required to remove the golden ones and don the plain linen garments.

Commentators explain that there is a law that prohibits the use of the garments used in his entry into the Holy of Holies for any other occasion; even for the next year's service. Hence if he were to wear his golden vestments, he would have had to purchase new ones every year. This would have constituted an extraordinary expense of the Jewish people's money.

However, it is clear that the golden vestments were not just for decoration. They were the physical manifestation of spiritual adornment and richness. And if wearing golden vestments meant that he would now be equipped with the most effective

means of enhancing his spiritual stature, why was he be denied that power when it would have seemed most needed?

Defining Pity

To answer this question we must delve more deeply into the Talmudic principle that "the Torah has pity on the money of the Jewish people." This principle is often substituted in the Talmud (Menachot 89) for the opposite rule: "There is no place for poverty in a place of wealth." This means that in the Temple they were not to skimp on the things that were necessary for its service. Why is it then that in some instances they valued and incorporated gold and other signs of affluence because they reflected a parallel dimension of spiritual wealth, while in other instances they would avoid incurring such extra expenses?

To answer this question we must examine the use of the word "pity" employed by the Talmud and Midrash in this regard. Where else do we find the concept of "pity" in our tradition?

The answer to this question can be found in the order of Passover Seder when we eat the Romaine Lettuce as one of the forms—and indeed the most

preferred form—of bitter herbs. The Aramaic word for Romaine Lettuce is *chasa* which the Talmud (Pesachim 39a) translates as "G-d has pity."

Moreover the very name for this Holiday of Passover in Hebrew is Pesach. One of the translations of Pesach, as rendered by the classical Aramaic translator Onkeles as well as Rashi, is "G-d had **pity**."

At this point we should pause to better understand of the dynamics of pity, or mercy, and how it ties in with the more basic translation of Pesach—also rendered by Rashi—as Passover.

When a person is deserving of assistance the helper does so not out of pity or compassion but out of a feeling of doing what is right. When however someone does not deserve to be helped, and despite of that we do help this person, we call this act pity or compassion. The act of compassion is to pass over and ignore the arguments that favor our not helping that person. Compassion involves passing over and circumventing one's own sense of justice and fairness.

In theological terms, G-dly compassion involves revealing a dimension of G-d that transcends the parameters that He Himself created and made part

of the operating system of the universe. Such compassion is an expression of the ultimate miracle. In fact the greatest part of the miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea was not the suspension of the natural law that governs the flow of water. Rather, the greatest part of the miracle was that G-d ignored the argument of the angels who declared: "Both of these groups are idolaters; what distinguishes one from the other?" To save the Israelites G-d had to overrule the angels who are the representatives and advocates of the very system that G-d Himself put into place.

We can now understand the concept that "the Torah has pity on the money of the Jewish people" also on a higher level. It does not just mean that we try to save money to avoid impoverishing the community. It also may mean that there are times that G-d overrides the system of money and articles of value such as gold, and renders the benefits that accrue from, unnecessary.

The Value of Gold

Gold, money, and all of our material resources are part of G-d's creation which provide us with the means to serve G-d. Indeed, the Midrash tells us

that G-d created gold specifically for the construction of the Mishkan, the Holy Temple in the desert, as well as subsequent sanctuaries. Out of sheer benevolence, G-d allows us to enjoy the use of gold as well. But we must always remember that gold and, by extension, all material goods are intended for a higher purpose.

How do we prove our worthiness to G-d? One measure of our relationship with G-d is determined by the way we utilize our resources—particularly our most precious resources—to serve Him. The more we are willing to spend on helping the needy, supporting Jewish education, purchasing supplies for the Shabbat and Jewish Holidays, et al, the more we show how much we appreciate the real reason we have been given all of these possessions. This is the mode of serving G-d in a state of wealth.

However on Yom Kippur the Kohain Gadol, when he entered into the Holy of Holies, did not wear his golden vestments because he did not need them; he transcended them. As he entered this holiest place on earth he touched the Essence of the Divine which was far beyond gold and every other expression of sophistication. He overrode the system in the same manner that G-d overrode His own system by taking us out of the Egyptian exile. Thus on Yom Kippur

when in the Holy of Holies, the Kohain Gadol no longer needed to prove his/our spiritual worthiness. He/we no longer need the gold to serve G-d. He/we can serve Him with the simplest of garments, with the simple, sincere and pure expression of our souls. At this juncture G-d does not need our sophistication; He wants simplicity.

The Connection between Parsha, Passover and Shabbat Hagadol

And here we see the connection between the Torah reading—which discusses the Yom Kippur service—and the upcoming Passover Holiday. Both of these holy days have the twin elements of compassion and passing over. On Yom Kippur the Kohain Gadol divests himself of and "passes over" the conventional use of gold and glitter—"the Torah has **pity** on (i.e. empowers us to override the need for) the money of Israel." Similarly, on Passover G-d has pity on the Jewish nation and overrides His system of justice to liberate them from Egypt as they were, unadorned. (Indeed, there is a custom in some communities to wear a kittel—the white garment that is worn on Yom Kippur—at the Seder. Both days express the

idea of G-d not looking for wealth but preferring our simple devotion that emanates from the soul.)

The Shabbat before Passover is known as Shabbat Hagadol, the Great Sabbath. Countless reasons have been given for the distinction this Shabbat enjoys in being so named. This year's reading of the parsha, which best highlights the role of the Kohain **Gadol,** ties in with Shabbat Ha**Gadol.** Both feature the idea of "gadol" which means "great". Shabbat is the day which provides is with the inspiration and power we need for the events of the forthcoming week. Hence it is this Shabbat that endows Passover with the power of Divine mercy which enables us to pass over all the obstacles to Redemption.

Relative Wealth

The final Redemption is modeled after the first liberation of the Jewish people from Egypt. However there is one significant difference between them. Whereas the Exodus from Egypt required an act of Divine compassion because they did not yet earn their worthiness, but the final Redemption is different. The thousands of years of dedication and sacrifice for G-d, His Torah, and His people have made us the most spiritually wealthy and deserving

people. However, the idea of simplicity acquires a new meaning. For despite our wealth, i.e., our worthiness, and notwithstanding all of our investments into the ultimate Redemption, we will reap much more. We will then discover infinitely more than however much we have put into it. Our incredible efforts and accumulation of wealth today are really rather poor and minuscule relative to the wealth which we will receive in the future.

This is how Chassidic thought interprets the enigmatic words of the Talmud (Sanhedrin 97a) that Moshiach will come when we are distracted from his coming. The original Hebrew words *hesech ha'da'at*, however, convey a far different meaning: Moshiach's coming will reveal such glory and grandeur that they will exceed our wildest imagination. May we see the complete fulfillment of this promise, Now!

ESSAY TWO

THE YOM KIPPUR LOTTERY

While nothing in life is arbitrary there are things that defy logic.

Yom Kippur introduces us to that higher dynamic, which enables us to change.

ESSAY TWO

THE YOM KIPPUR LOTTERY

The Two Goats

One of Judaism's most enigmatic rituals was the "*Sa'ir l'azazel*- the Scapegoat." Every Yom Kippur, as recounted in this week's Torah portion, the Jewish people would offer two goats as sacrifices: one was offered in the traditional manner in the Temple and the other was thrown off a rugged cliff. To decide which of the two identical goats would stay within the Temple confines and which one would be pushed off the cliff, lots were cast.

As Yom Kippur rituals, both of these offerings served as a means of atonement for the Jewish people.

Several questions come to mind:

First, why two offerings?

Second why was one of the offerings not brought in the Temple as all other offerings are?

Third, why did they decide which was offered in the Temple and which outside of the Temple, by casting lots?

Parallel Forces

Chassidic literature refers to the fact that the word Azazel, is an acronym for the Biblical phrase: "Es zeh le'umat zeh asah Elokim-This corresponding to the other did G-d make." This statement teaches that for all the forces of good and holiness in the world, G-d created a corresponding measure of evil and unholiness. By creating both good and evil, G-d gave us the opportunity to choose between right and wrong, thus endowing our actions with purpose and meaning.

Can We Change?

Yom Kippur is the day that we are required to "do" teshuvah, to repent, return to G-d and change ourselves. How can we really change? Can we truly transform our behavior and character? If we have a predilection to one type of behavior, how realistic is the Torah's demand that we change it?

The answer is provided by the two goats and the symbolism behind them. One goat - representing good – stays inside the Temple, while the other, representing evil, is cast down a cliff outside the Temple. As was stated earlier, the decision as to which goat went where was made by casting lots. It is because the lots that were cast were not just arbitrary criteria, but were G-d's way of showing us that His decision, as to which goat should remain in the Temple and which goat should not, was not based on logic, but on G-d's ability to transcend logic and reason.

Similarly, no matter how compelling it might seem for one to go in the wrong direction, one has the G-d given power to transcend the realm of logic, and choose to go down the right path. No matter how strong the forces to do evil may be, the divine power of free choice is even greater.

Transcending Logic

The arbitrariness of the lottery system in determining where the goats would go, underscores Judaism's insistence that we do not limit our dedication to good and repudiation of evil to the limits imposed by logic and reason. We must do

good even when it seems to be unreasonable and flies in the face of logic. And when logic says that it is good enough, we must become "unreasonable" – ignore the limits of reason – and go beyond the borders of goodness imposed by that logic.

Conversely, we must reject evil, even when one cannot find a compelling reason to do so. And we must repudiate evil beyond the rational reasons one has for such rejection. Our rejection of evil must be utter and absolute, not measured and calculated.

Distracted from Moshiach?

The Talmud declares that Moshiach will come "*B'hesech hada'as* (literally: with a removal of the mind)-when our minds are distracted from him." Commentators question how this is possible in light of the imperative to eagerly anticipate Moshiach's arrival every moment.

The answer provide by Chassidic thought is that Moshiach's coming and the subsequent Redemption will inaugurate an age when our commitment to G-d and Torah will transcend logic and reason. Moshiach will make "*hesech hada'as*," he will "remove our minds" not by turning off our minds, but after reaching the limits of logic and reasoning,

he will introduce us to a higher level of awareness, one that transcends reasoning and logic.

ESSAY THREE

ODD COMBINATION

Although it sounds irrational, the highest and lowest realms can reside in the same person or situation.

ESSAY THREE

ODD COMBINATION

The Peak of Holiness and the Nadir of Depravity

This week's Torah portion of Acharei has been noted for its unusual combination of themes. It begins with a description of the service of the Kohain Gadol (High Priest), in the Holy Temple on Yom Kippur. There can be no greater amalgamation of holiness. The Kohain Gadol was the holiest Jew; the Holy Temple was the holiest place on Earth and the day of Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the year!

Yet, the end of this week's Torah portion of Acharei deals with the most reprehensible immoral acts, such as incest, adultery and so on. Why would the Torah wish to juxtapose the most sacred of experiences with the most base forms of human behavior?

Furthermore, this Torah reading that we will be reading this Shabbat is also the Torah reading for Yom Kippur. Why would a Jew on this solemn day

of the year, when every Jew rises above the ordinary and is closer to G-d, have to be admonished not to commit the most degrading acts of immorality?

The Higher it is the Lower it can Affect

The answer lies in a better understanding of the function of Yom Kippur, the Kohain Gadol and the Holy Temple. From the perspective of Judaism, the more holy something is, the greater its capacity to "reach down" and to affect even the lowliest aspects of life. Only the holiest Jew can refine and uplift the lowliest Jew. Only the holiest day of the year can instill sanctity in the most ordinary days of the year and only the

Holy Temple could disseminate light and holiness to the farthest reaches of the world.

The objective of Judaism is to see to it that everyone is ultimately refined and capable of having a relationship with G-d. This can only be accomplished if those of us who are more knowledgeable and spiritually more sophisticated reach out to those who appear lost to the Jewish people.

Parshas Acharei is usually read soon after the Passover Holiday. At the Seder we respond to the questions of the Four Sons. It has been pointed out that the *rasha*-wicked or rebellious son is placed and addressed right after the *chacham*-wise son. The question has been raised why place the one who is farthest from the Passover experience with the one who is closest to it?

The Previous Rebbe answered that only the wise son, can affect the *rasha* the wicked or rebellious son.

The Hierarchy of Generations

There is a belief that our generation is the lowest of all preceding generation sin terms of it spiritual standing. This belief is buttressed by the statement in the Talmud that as generations progress the people regress:

> If the earlier generations were like angels we are like people. If they are like people we are like donkeys..

The rationale for this is based on the fact that as time goes on we are further removed from the most defining event of history, the giving of the Torah at

Mount Sinai. At that momentous event, G-d revealed Himself to every Jew. The further away from that event the less we are imbued with the spirit of Sinai.

In general terms this belief is indeed valid and is clearly evident in the number of Jews who have strayed so far from the ideals of Judaism.

Thus, the Alter Rebbe in his classic work the Tanya cites the characterization of our period as the "heel" of time, as compared to the generation of Moses which is described as the "head" generation.

The Uniqueness of Our Lowest-Highest Generation

However, precisely because we are, in many ways, the lowliest generation and the farthest from Sinai, we are in need of the highest form of spiritual leadership. In Chassidic circles it is accepted that from the Ba'al Shem Tov onward, G-d has unleashed the most lofty of souls to help uplift the fallen souls of our final generations before the Final redemption.

Moreover, although we are at the most distant point from Sinai, chronologically speaking, we are the closest to the revolutionary new Divine revelations of the Messianic Age.

Our close proximity to the time of Redemption give us an edge over all the preceding generations.

Our generation with its paradoxical lowliness and sublime light is the model for the Messianic Age. It will reveal the highest degree of holiness and will therefore will permeate even the lowest and lowliest precincts of existence. As the prophet states, "All flesh will see G-dliness." Then even the basest of existence will be transformed because of the presence of the most sublime G-dly light.

ESSAY FOUR

ONE DAY

Yom Kippur is much more than a Day of Atonement.

It is a day of "At-one-ment" where we experience total unity with G-d.

ESSAY FOUR

ONE DAY

Why mention "Once a Year?"

Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, occurs in the month of Tishrei. Nevertheless, we read of this Holy Day several times throughout the year in our weekly Torah portions. In this week's parsha, Acharei-Kedoshim, the Torah goes into elaborate detail concerning the offerings that were to be brought to the Beis Hamikdash-the Holy Temple - by the Kohain Gadol-the High Priest.

The Torah describes Yom Kippur, in Acharei-Kedoshim as "*achas bashanah,"* routinely translated as a "once a year" observance.

Why is it necessary to state here that it is only one day a year? Only a few verses earlier, the Torah explicitly states that Yom Kippur is observed on the tenth day of the month of Tishrei. It also states that "on this **day** G-d shall atone for you." There is no

obvious need to repeat that Yom Kippur is a one day Holiday.

One day "*in* the year"

Another difficulty arises when we consider the literal translation of the words "*achas bashanah*." Instead of "once a year," the literal rendition is: "Once **in** the year." Why the emphasis on the fact that it is one day "in" the year? What other place could the day be if not "in the year?"

There is one other place where the Torah employs the expression "in the year" with regard to a Holiday. In a subsequent parsha (*Vayikra* 23:40-41) that discusses the festival of Sukkos, the Torah states:

> "...You should rejoice before G-d your G-d, for a period of seven days. You should celebrate it as a festival to G-d for seven days **in the year**..."

Here too, the Torah adds the preposition "in" in relation to the word "year." Why does this phenomenon only occur with regard to Yom Kippur and Sukkos?

Furthermore, what do these two Holidays have in common? On the surface, Yom Kippur and Sukkos seem to be complete opposites. The former is a solemn day of fasting and prayer, whereas the latter is a period of incredible joy and feasting.

The Five Names of the Soul

The Hebrew word for "one" that the Torah employs here is *achas*. According to Rabbenu Nissim, cited by the Tosphos commentary on the Talmud (*Menachos* 18a) that term has another connotation as well. *Achas* refers to the level of the soul called "*yechidah*."

To explain the significance of *yechidah* and its relationship to Yom Kippur, it is necessary to elaborate on the Midrash and Zohar's description of the five levels of the G-dly soul. They are listed in ascending order as: *nefesh, ru'ach, neshama, chaya* and *yechidah.*

Nefesh-Ruach-Neshama: Action, Emotion and Intellect

The first and lowest level of the soul, *nefesh*, is identified as the part of the soul that is responsible

for our actions. When a Jew is motivated to do a Mitzvah and is engaged in its performance, it is the *nefesh* that is expressing itself.

When we invest our actions with emotion, love and awe, it is the level of *ru'ach* that is active within us.

To develop a profound understanding of the Mitzvah and a deep intellectual awareness of G-d's greatness, we must bring the next level of the soul, called *neshama*, to the fore.

Chaya-Will; Yechidah-Delight

However, the Jew who is able to exercise a tremendous will-power, one that enables him or her to go beyond his or her understanding and sacrifice physical comfort and personal needs to fulfill the will of G-d, is actually being empowered by the transcendent aspect of his or her soul called *chaya.*

However, the highest and most powerful level of the soul—sometimes identified as the soul's very essence—is the *yechidah.* From the vantage point of the *yechidah* there is no need to sacrifice oneself to G-d. Sacrifice implies that there are two disparate entities, one of which must surrender itself to the other. But on the level of *yechidah*, the Jew feels

such an intrinsic attachment to G-d that there is no sense that he or she is surrendering to Him.

In addition, at the level of *yechidah* one is in touch with the inner delight that is the source of all other faculties. Why do we harbor the desire for something? It arises when our inner delight motivates us to want that particular something. It's the inner delight that motivates us to use our *nefesh* and *ru'ach* to think, emote and act. It is the source of all else that transpires in our lives.

The Yom Kippur Five

On Yom Kippur, we are required to pray five times, as opposed to Shabbos and other Holidays when there are only four required prayers.

Chassidic literature explains that these five prayers correspond to and affect all of the five levels of the soul. When we reach the concluding prayer of *ne'ilah*, the soul's *yechidah is* expressed. That experience is so powerful that it can totally transform the person who, for whatever reason, was incapable of being so inspired throughout the rest of the year. And while the entire day of Yom Kippur is a day of five prayers, implying that the level of

yechidah is present throughout the day, it is most dominant during the fifth prayer, *ne'ilah.*

We can now understand why the Torah refers to Yom Kippur in Acharei-Kedoshim as "*achas*." It is intended to teach us that Yom Kippur not just a one day Holiday but rather is a day when the *achas*, i.e., the *yechidah*, is fully revealed.

We can now also answer the second question posed above, why the Torah refers to the day as "one day **in** the year."

This can be resolved in light of the foregoing understanding of *achas* as the level of *yechidah*, but first a prefatory story is in order.

Tefillin "On" the Head or "In" the Head?

Once, when a Czarist official observed the Alter Rebbe wearing his Tefillin, the official was overcome with dread. When a Chosid asked the Alter Rebbe to explain this incident, he replied by referring to a passage in the Talmud:

> Rabbi Eliezer the Great stated: "When the Torah says, 'And all the nations of the earth will see the name of G-d called upon you and

> they will fear you,' it was referring to the Head Tefillin."

Thus, when the Czarist official noticed my Tefillin he was overcome with fear."

The Chosid then asked the Alter Rebbe, "Why doesn't that happen when I wear Tefillin? It does not elicit any fearful reaction by the nations who notice me wearing them."

The Alter Rebbe replied:

> "In the Talmudic text it does not say that Tefillin that we wear **on** the head evoke fear. Rather it says, Tefillin that are **in** the head."

By this, the Alter Rebbe makes it clear that for the Tefillin to be awe inspiring to an outsider it must be internalized within one's head. The message of Tefillin, which is G-d's absolute unity, must become an integral part of one's consciousness.

Here too, we may suggest, when the Torah describes the day of Yom Kippur as a day of *achas*, a day when the *yechidah* of the soul is revealed, it cannot be allowed to dissipate when Yom Kippur is over. The Torah exhorts us to extend the effect of the *yechidah* that we experienced on Yom Kippur **into** the other days of the year. However, the message

here is that it does not suffice for it to be extended **to** the other days of the year; instead it must be *achas bashanah*, one day, a *yechidah* day, **in** the days of the year.

Yom Kippur poses a unique challenge that does not exist in other Holidays. Because of Yom Kippur's singular role as G-d's designated Day of Atonement it captures the *yechidah.* One would thus be entitled to think that it is impossible to have this Yom Kippur/*yechidah* experience any other time of the year. To dispel this notion the Torah states, "*achas bashanah*," one can take the *achas/yechidah* and instill it **into** the rest of the year.

There is a similar challenge with the Festival of Sukkos, which requires and empowers us to celebrate for a full cycle of seven days. Could we reasonably contemplate the idea of bringing that powerful joy to the rest of the year? Most would say that it is simply impossible. To dispel that notion, here too, the Torah states "seven days **in** the year." These seven days do not have to end with the culmination of Sukkos. They can be extended and instilled within the rest of the year.

Moshiach: The Yechidah of Souls

How can we take the profound soul experiences of Yom Kippur or the unmitigated Festival joy of Sukkos into an ordinary weekday?

To answer this question we must recall the teaching of Kabbalah and Chassidus that there were/are five unique personalities who represent the five soul-modalities mentioned above. King David represented all the souls on the level of *nefesh*. Elijah represented *ru'ach*, Moses *neshama*, Adam *chaya* while Moshiach will embodies the level of *yechidah*.

When we connect our lives to Moshiach and focus our attention on what we can do to bring Moshiach and the Final Redemption in our days, we can then experience the level of *yechidah.*

The "mere" desire to be there places us there in consonance with what the Ba'al Shem Tov taught: "A person is where his will is." If we truly *want* to be with Moshiach—and express that desire sincerely by attempting to live our lives in harmony with the ideals of Moshiach—we are there!

When we live a Moshiach life we ignite the internal spark of Moshiach within us—our *yechidah*—and we get a taste of the profound joy of Sukkos that is

a portent of the perennial joy we will experience in the Messianic Age

ESSAY FIVE

L'CHAIM TO LIFE – 1

There is an intrinsic quality to life.

The greatest quality of life is the quality of life itself.

ESSAY FIVE

L'CHAIM TO LIFE - 1

The Inestimable Value of Life

Life is Judaism's most precious value.

This axiom of Judaism is based on a verse in this week's Parsha that states: "You shall keep My statutes, and My ordinances, which a person shall do and **live** by them." (Leviticus 18:5) Our Sages (Talmud, Yoma 85b) stress the juxtaposition of the admonition to keep G-d's commandments with the admonition to live with them. This teaches us, that we should **live** to do G-d's commandments and not die for them.

To be sure, Judaism has a place for martyrdom. As one writer said, "If there is nothing worth dying for, there is also nothing worth living for." This does not mean, however, that Judaism is founded on the notion that we should all strive to die for G-d. Rather, the focus is to live for G-d, even as we must

be prepared, in some limited circumstances, to give our lives for G-d.

Why the Obsession?

Why is Judaism so obsessed with life?

It is not — as a common misconception among some in the Jewish community — because Judaism believes only in the here and now and rejects the belief in the hereafter. Judaism is unequivocally on record as believing in the immortality of the soul. Judaism also embraces the notion that the soul "goes" to a "place" that can be called Paradise or Heaven, where it embarks on a new phase in the soul's development. Ethics of the Fathers state unequivocally: "This world is a like a vestibule, to enter into the world-to-come. Prepare yourself in the vestibule so you can enter the palace."

Thus, if Judaism affirms life in this physical world it is not because it denies the afterlife. Judaism rather believes that there can be no greater affirmation of G-d's existence than the introduction of a soul into a human body, with its capacity to make G-d's plan a reality.

Even a so-called "vegetable" — i.e., a human being who can no longer function — still possesses the G-dly essence that transcends the value of any specific activity that a person can no longer perform. In other words, as long as there is life, there is a potent presence of G-d in the world.

New-Born's Effects on the World

As a way of illustrating this point, I was once told of a new-born baby who was fighting for her life, a struggle she ultimately lost after two months. The entire community was galvanized. People were helping the family; providing material assistance and moral support. People were reciting heartfelt prayers for her recovery. Huge sums of charity were distributed to a host of noble causes for her sake. Many people began to do their own soul-searching and had their lives changed for the good.

In short, as one woman observed to me, "This little baby, in the brief two months of her life, accomplished more than dozens of rabbis combined had accomplished in their entire lives."

This moving story demonstrates the intrinsic value of human life. This precious little soul had not spoken a word to anyone, nor performed any tasks

that could directly benefit the world. Yet, her mere presence in this word was able to turn a community on its head.

The Myth of Jewish Passivity

This obsession for life explains why, throughout Jewish history, Jews did not fight their enemy. It was not because Judaism is a passive and pacifist religion. On the contrary, the Torah obligates us to defend ourselves and others whose lives are threatened.

Rather, the reason for Jewish reticence in the face of adversity was the fear that their actions will result in a far greater loss of life than they would sustain by not fighting. Fighting solely to show courage, in and of itself, was never a Jewish value. The primary consideration that entered a Jew's mind when confronted with danger was, "what can I do to save as many lives as possible." That was often followed by the thought, "how can I continue to perform another Mitzvah or study some more Torah?"

The Belief in Techiyas Hameisim-the Resurrection of the Dead

With this positive view of life, we can better appreciate the Jewish belief that the dead will ultimately come back to life in the Messianic Age.

Notwithstanding Judaism's affirmation of the belief in the afterlife, where the soul lives on without its body, there is something unique about existence of the soul **within** a body.

So fundamental is this belief, known as *Techiyas Hameisim*, that Maimonides included it in his Thirteen Principles of Faith.

Moreover, according to Nachmanides and other great authorities, the ultimate reward will be eternal life in a physical body, within the confines of this physical world that we inhabit.

All of this is a conceptual extension of Judaism's obsession with life—L'Chaim!

ESSAY SIX

L'CHAIM-TO LIFE! II

Life to be experienced in its fullest sense must be one of plurality dedicated to a singularity.

ESSAY SIX

L'CHAIM-TO LIFE! II

Life in the Plural

One of Judaism's major contributions to the world has been its emphasis on life. In this week's parsha the Torah states:

> "You shall guard My statutes and My judgments which a person shall do, and you shall **live** by them, I am G-d."

The words "and you shall live by them" appear to be superfluous.

Knowing that there are **no** superfluous words in the Torah, our sages deduced from this phrase G-d's instruction that we must live with the commandants and not die with them. Life takes precedence over all but three of the commandments.

On a deeper level, commentators observe that Judaism is not just about life in its most accessible

sense. Our challenge is to infuse every aspect of our physical existence with spiritual meaning and life.

This, perhaps, is what Rashi had in mind when he interpreted the word "life" here as a reference to the World-to-Come. It is only in the future Messianic Age that we will be able to fully appreciate and experience the true and ultimate meaning of life. In the present, our responsibility is to do our part in discovering the deeper dimensions of life and infusing them at into our practice of the Mitzvos.

Complex Beings

In Hebrew, the word for life *chaim* is in the plural. Three reasons, based on Chassidic teaching, can be given for this phenomenon:

The first explanation for *chaim's* plural nature is that it reflects the complexity of human life. We are taught that true life is an amalgam of different components, colors, hues and shades (Introduction to Tanya).

When the Talmud (*Eiruvin* 13b) wishes to express how the conflicting views of Beis [School of] Shammai and Beis [School of] Hillel are both valid, it states: "These [the words of Beis Shamai] and

these [the words of Beis Hillel] are "*Divrei Elokim* ***Chaim***-the words of the living G-d." In this phrase both the word for G-d [*Elokim*] and the word for living [*Chaim*] are expressed in the plural.

Chassidic thought explains that G-d's unified light becomes refracted into a rainbow-spectrum of light beams when it is filtered through the different G-dly attributes and diverse human attitudes. The Light then assumes the appearance of the various attributes and mindsets.

We can now understand that the word *chaim* reflects the full spectrum of Divine attributes that characterize the different human personality types.

But, while each individual mostly reflects one color of the refracted light, Kabbalah and Chassidic thought teach us that, in truth, each and every one of us possesses a full complement of faculties.

Let us translate this concept into terms that we can apply in our own lives. We can see that the plural usage of *chaim* implies that to live life to the fullest we must learn to reflect the Light with **all** our soul's multifarious faculties and talents.

Human Uniqueness

Angels and animals cannot draw upon the complex system of feelings that we experience as humans because they do not possess these variegated faculties.

Each human being has thus been referred to as a "miniature world." Every creation and force that exists in the macrocosm is reflected in the microcosm. Indeed, have we not been taught that "Whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world. (Sanhedrin 37a)"?

Frequently we are unable to be at peace with ourselves because we do not understand the complexity of our nature. When we vacillate from one direction to another we can become distraught because it seems that we cannot maintain consistency.

In truth, the problem is not necessarily the lack of consistency in our lives, but our inability to recognize that we are multifaceted beings. If we had a deep knowledge of ourselves, we would know that we are composites of opposite feelings. We would recognize that the challenge is not curbing the

tendency to go in different directions but to know **when** to go in the different directions. Furthermore, we are challenged to elicit the appropriate emotion for the occasion. We are not being inconsistent if we dance at a wedding and grieve at a funeral. The problem of consistency arises when we are joyful at the funeral and are gloomy at the wedding. The problem is not consistency itself but rather knowing when, where and how to express a given emotion.

In the present day and age we may find ourselves unable to be in touch with our multifaceted emotions and to express them in an unimpeded and balanced fashion. It cannot come as any surprise that *Galus*-exile conditions block our ability to be fully expressive.

In these days immediately prior to the Festival of Passover, also known as the Season of our Freedom, we must surely focus on our freedom from the slavery we knew in Egypt. It is no less important for us to acknowledge our need for the spiritual freedom to express all our faculties in the most harmonious and productive way.

Composite of Phases

The second reason for the usage of the word *chaim* in the plural is based on a discourse of the Rebbe (*Likkutei Sichos*, volume 24, p. 177-187) which describes our existence as a composite of two phases and influences. During the first phase, we try to integrate all that with which we have been endowed with what we have accumulated from the experiences and achievements of our lives. In the second phase our task is to add to that which was given to us.

The Rebbe likens this effort to the process of birth. Even before a child is born it lives within its mother's womb. It is alive. Yet, we do not call that a life in the **fullest** sense of the word

In truth, all of life is like birth. There are "unborn" and "birthed" elements to every moment of our lives. Yesterday's accomplishments are gifts that we take along with us on our life's journey. While yesterday these accomplishments were ours and were attained with much effort, relative to today they are gifts that we take with us. It's what we do today that determines whether we are truly alive. Yesterday's life, relative to what we can make of life

today, is like the fetus in the womb when compared to life after birth.

If one were to live one's life using only the vitality that was bequeathed by others, it would not be a complete life. That "receiving" aspect of life represents only one part of the whole.

Moreover, even if we have achieved much on our own but retired to rest on our laurels, we would not enjoy the full measure of life. This compares to the fetus that is not considered a full-fledged soul because, while it is a living being, its life is remains one-dimensional. It only has that which its mother gives it.

Life lived to the fullest requires that a human being know how to draw on the past as a catalyst to promote future growth. But one who remains content with yesterday's achievements lacks the true vitality that is known in Hebrew as *chaim* - in the plural.

In every venture we must ask ourselves a two-part question: is what we're doing now derived from or based on existing knowledge and inspiration; and what new insights and feelings are we generating?

Here too, the limitations posed by Galus inhibit our ability to forge ahead. We appear to need all of our

spiritual energy just to hold on to what we already have acquired. Our life in Galus, therefore, is close to that of the child growing in its fetal position doing nothing on its own, totally dependent on its mother; it is a one dimensioned form of life. The World-to-Come will free us from that constrained life.

Shared Life

The Rebbe also expounded the third reason why the word *chaim* is used in the plural. He explained that a life which is not lived in concert with others is not worthy of the title life. For life to be worthy of its name it must be a shared life.

This thought, that life is only worthy of its name if it is a life lived in the plural, is rooted in the Talmud (*Ta'anit* 23a). *Choni HaMa'agel* (the "Circle Drawer") was a saintly miracle worker of the Second Temple era. *Choni* awoke from a seventy year sleep and discovered that none of his peers remained alive. He asked G-d to take him from this world too. The Talmud characterizes his desire to leave this world with the words: "Either friendship or death."

Elsewhere the Talmud (*Bava Batra* 16b) describes the kinship of Job's friends and the way they gathered from far and wide to comfort him. The Talmud explains that they had sensed Job's terrible suffering and were all impelled to rally to him. The Talmud then concludes with the statement: "This echoes the folk saying 'Either friends like those of Job or death!'"

Indeed, this very thought was at the root of Eve's creation. G-d says: "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make him a helpmate." (Genesis 2:18). Thus the basic rationale for marriage in the eyes of the Torah is companionship.

However, as much as we need to focus on ideal relationships and show a commitment to the commandments, reflecting the true definition of *chaim*, Rashi informs us that living with the commandments will become a true reality only in the World-to-Come. In Galus our ability to connect to others is compromised. Our challenge now is to do our utmost to enhance our relationships with others and restore the idyllic marriage of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. **This** will prepare us for the time about which we sing in the wedding Sheva Berachos:

"O G-d our G-d, may there be heard in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, the ר sound of joy...the sound of a groom and the sound of a bride."

ESSAY SEVEN

LIVE WITH THEM

The beauty of Judaism is that it allows us ot soar to the greatest spiritual heights but considers our transformation of the physical world its primary focus.

Indeed, when we fuse the two movements together we get the Messianic symphony.

ESSAY SEVEN

LIVE WITH THEM

The Introduction

Before the Torah introduces the admonition against emulating the abominable behaviors of the Egyptians and Canaanites, the Torah inserts the following:

> "Carry out My laws and safeguard My decrees to follow them; I am G-d your G-d. You shall observe My decrees and My laws, which man shall carry out and **you will live by them** – I am G-d."

What does the Torah mean when it says, "...and you will live by them?"

The Talmudic Sages (Sanhedrin 74a) derive from this verse that the Mitzvos-Divine commandments were given for the sake of life, not death. With the exception of three cardinal sins (Idolatry, forbidden relations and murder) the preservation of life takes precedence over the performance of a Mitzvah. For example, one whose life may be at risk by fasting on

Yom Kippur does not have to fast, and indeed, is told not to fast.

The question can be asked, why does the Torah introduce the concept of the supremacy of life over the observance of a Mitzvah as a preface to enumeration of the forbidden relationships?

This is puzzling, as forbidden relationships are actually one of the exceptions to the general rule. If one is threatened with death or committing adultery, for example, he may not violate this commandment; he must die rather than submit. Why then does the Torah preface the "life above all else" imperative to a section where that imperative does not apply?

Rashi Anticipated the Question

It is possible that Rashi anticipated this question and it may have prompted him to explain that the reference to living here is to the World-to-Come. Rashi supports this interpretation with the following argument:

> "If you shall say that it refers to this world, is it not true that he will die in the end?"

At first glance, this proof is hard to grasp. What does Rashi mean that ultimately he will die? Why can't the Torah mean that by observing the commandments people will live longer and more wholesome years? Alternatively, why didn't Rashi cite the Talmud's explanation that we should live and not die in the observance of Mitzvos?

It may be conjectured, that Rashi was referring specifically to the commandments that follow in the Biblical text, i.e., the forbidden relationships, concerning which one must die rather than transgress. Rashi therefore argues how can the Torah be referring to life in this world if one is required to surrender that life to avoid a forbidden relationship? Rashi therefore concludes that with respect to these commandments the meaning of "...and you will **live** by them" is in the life in the World-to-Come.

World-to-Come: Eternal Life on Earth

Taken at face value Rashi seems to be alluding to the afterlife of the undying soul. However, upon deeper reflection Rashi may actually be referring to the period in the Messianic Age when the dead will come back to life and we will all enjoy eternal life in

this physical world. This period is referred to as *Techiyas Hameisim*-the Resurrection of the Dead.

Hence, **all** Mitzvos are associated with life. In this pre-*Techiyas Hameisim* period, most Mitzvos demand living life to the fullest in the most literal sense while some apply to the future. The common denominator is that all of these Mitzvos are associated with life in this physical world.

The question can now be reversed. Why would the Torah introduce the concept of living with our Mitzvah observance in the context of a Mitzvah which relates to life in the future?

Preparing for the Future

The answer is that all the Mitzvos we perform now prepare us for the *Techiyas Hameisim* era.

This premise is rooted in the words of the Tanya [the classic work of Chassidus, authored by the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of the Chabad movement].

In chapter 36, the Alter Rebbe explained that the purpose of G-d's creation of our world is that "G-d desired an abode in the lowest realms," referring to our physical world. We inhabit a world in which G-

d's presence is utterly concealed, and He created this world of spiritual darkness with the intention of reversing that concealment and darkness so that His presence should ultimately be revealed.

The fulfillment of G-d's plan to make the world an abode for Himself will come to pass in the Messianic era, the period for which the world was originally created, and especially the period after the resurrection of the dead. Then G-dliness will be manifest throughout the world and all the nations on earth will experience Divine revelation

The Alter Rebbe continues to elaborate on this theme in Chapter 37:

> "Now this ultimate perfection of the Messianic era and [the time of] the resurrection of the dead, meaning the revelation of *Ein Sof-light* in this physical world is dependent on our actions and [divine] service throughout the period of exile. For it is the Mitzvah itself that causes [i.e., creates] its reward. For by performing [the Mitzvah] man draws the revelation of the blessed *Ein Sof* [infinite]-light from above downwards to be clothed in the physicality of this world."

After a lengthy analysis of how the Mitzvah reveals unadulterated G-dliness into the physical world, the Alter Rebbe continues:

> "It follows, therefore, that the purpose of the Messianic Era and of the resurrection of the dead, namely, the revelation of His glory and Divinity , and the banishment of the spirit of impurity from the earth, is entirely dependent on [our] drawing down His G-dliness and the blessed *Ein Sof*-light upon all the 248 limbs of the vital soul of all Israel by the vital soul's performance of all the 248 positive Mitzvos and [this purpose is also dependent] on [our] banishing the spirit of impurity from the vital soul of all Israel by the vital soul's observance of all the 365 prohibitive Mitzvos."

In summary, whenever we perform a Mitzvah with the energy from our vital, animating soul and body with the use of a physical object we reveal G-d's infinite light in the physical world. The Messianic age, and particularly, the period following the resurrection of the dead, is when we will all see the fruits of our labors.

Thus, when we perform a Mitzvah we are actually introducing the Divine energy that will become fully manifest in the future resurrection-of-the-dead era.

This explains why the imperative to live with most Mitzvos (and not die because of them) is connected to the life of the future (the reward for the Mitzvos that require sacrificing our lives), for in truth, each and every Mitzvah introduces us to the life of the future. When we do a Mitzvah today we internalize the light of the future.

One can add to the above an important thought. Now after thousands of years of Mitzvos performed by countless individuals under the most strained conditions, we have already elicited virtually all of the Ein Sof-light of the future age of the resurrection.

Quality of Life or Life's Quality

Where do we see evidence of this unprecedented phenomenon of infinite Divine light ready to be revealed in the present era?

The answer is that we see it, paradoxically, in two opposite examples.

First, never before have we seen the medical advances that cure illnesses, remove pain, improve the quality of life, prolong it and even portend a time when we will be able to live indefinitely. The potential to live to well over a hundred is already here and the notion of eternal life is not so remote in the minds of even the most secular of scientists. Never before have we seen so many advances in the field of life. This phenomenon is clearly indicative of the future period of eternal life. However, since we are still in exile—albeit, on the threshold of Redemption—we see the effects of this revelation without seeing its source.

The Rebbe's exhortation to "open our eyes" can be applied to our need to look at the latest extraordinary changes in the world and attempt to see their source.

Second, we are also, ironically, witness to the greatest erosion of human life. Whether at the beginning of life or near its end, our society today is engaged in the worst possible assault on life's sanctity. The trite expression "quality of life" is used to deny the fact that life itself is the greatest quality, for it is an expression of the Divine in the physical realm and provides with the opportunity to do a Mitzvah.

As discussed in previous essays, whenever there is an explosion of positive energy in a certain direction, we will also witness a parallel surge of negative energy. This phenomenon is based on the words of King Solomon in Ecclesiastes that G-d creates parallel forces of good and evil. As long as we haven't totally left exile, evil asserts itself, particularly in the area where goodness and holiness are most pronounced. Precisely because we are on the very cusp of the age of eternal and unprecedented quality of life we are also experiencing the greatest erosion of and assault on life.

Three Lessons: Open Our Eyes, Savor and Fill

The lesson for us in these extraordinary times is threefold:

First, we should open our eyes to the reality of the life embracing/assaulting phenomenon as evidence that we are about to enter into the period of eternal life.

Second, we should do everything in our power to savor and treasure every moment of life as G-d greatest gift to us. We should do everything in our power to discourage the epidemic of threats to life

from the medical community by educating people about the true value of life. Whenever there is a question about undergoing a medical procedure that can impact life, only a competent Halachic authority should be consulted for guidance.

Third, we should fill every precious moment of life with Toras Chaim-the Torah of Life, the life affirming power of Torah study and Mitzvah observance, suffused with enthusiasm and revel in the knowledge that we will imminently see the fruit of our labor, with the immediate Redemption.

ESSAY EIGHT

REACH FOR THE STARS WITH YOUR FEET ON THE GROUND

Motivated by *our* selfish spiritual interests, spirituality and materiality are irreconcilable opposites.

Motivated by *G-d's* interests they are not only compatible; they complement each other.

ESSAY EIGHT

REACH FOR THE STARS WITH YOUR FEET ON THE GROUND

Follows Passover

This week's parsha, *Acharei,* is the Torah reading that follows the Festival of Passover. And in light of the principle established by the *Shaloh (R. Yeshayahu Halevi Hurvitz*, of sixteenth century fame) that there is an organic connection between a Festival and the Torah readings of that time, we must try to understand what is the connection between this week's parsha and the end of Passover.

Acharei deals with the aftermath of the untimely passing of Aaron's two sons. They were killed by a Divinely sent fire because they brought an unauthorized offering. Their zeal and passion, as noble as it was, took them beyond the bounds of propriety.

This *parsha* instructs Aaron to follow the proper

procedures when he enters the Temple, particularly the Holiest chamber of the Temple known as the *Kodesh Hakadoshim* and not be lured by his soul's passion.

The Danger and Remedy for Entering the Holy of Holies

Every one of us possesses a part of our personality that is holy and an even more essential part of our being that has been characterized as the "Holy of Holies" of our soul. This sacred precinct is rarely accessed and its effects hardly ever experienced. However, when it does happen, and a person is in a state of intense inspiration emanating from one's souls' essence, it is crucial that we know that even entering the Holy of Holies has its rules and protocol.

This premise, however, needs to be better clarified. When we are in touch with our Holy of Holies we are obviously so spiritually charged that our passion and devotion cannot be contained and limited. Why would we want to stifle the creative and spontaneous nature of our Holy of Holies? Isn't it a contradiction in terms to regulate the spirit within us that is beyond limitation? Doesn't Judaism,

particular, the mystical approach, demand of us to go out of our self-imposed limits?

The History of Paradox and the Paradox of Jewish History

In the answer to this question lies the uniqueness of Judaism. Judaism is about reaching for the heavens while keeping our feet planted firmly on the ground. Judaism digs deep into the innermost recesses of our soul without compromising one iota of the needs and demands of our outermost aspects of existence.

To master the paradox of Judaism, It takes not one lifetime but the continuum of lifetimes of all Jews from the moment of the inception of the Jewish nation when they departed from Egypt and received the Torah at Mount Sinai. From that time onward, the Jewish people have been attempting to create that cosmic balance between selflessness and self, transcendence and immanence, chaos and order, the supernatural and nature, spirituality and material pursuits, passion and discipline.

At times we were more inclined to the romantic and sublime aspects of Judaism and occasionally we tilted towards its more down-to-earth elements. But as time progresses, the world inexorably becomes

more and more attuned to the synthesis of the two extremes.

Moshiach: Mastery of the Paradox

For thousands of years we have been awaiting the coming of Moshiach. For many, this hope was motivated by the suffering and misery that Jews have endured through their long and arduous stay in exile. One can easily correlate the intensity of yearning for Messianic redemption with the misery quotient of the Jewish people.

However, underlying this painful reality and its role in inspiring Messianic fervor is a deeper more spiritual and positive motif for Jewish anticipation for the Messianic Era. This blessed age will enable us to finally master the paradox and experience the synthesis of Judaism. The Messianic Age will remove the dichotomies and conflicts in our lives and replace them with Divine harmony.

The Rebbe's Message

The Lubavitcher Rebbe spoke—on the 28th of Nissan of the year 5752 (1992)—of how we are on the threshold of Redemption. The Rebbe exhorted us

to do everything in our power to bring Moshiach. The Rebbe then characterized this mission in Kabalistic terms: "To introduce the light of *Tohu*, 'the world of chaos,'' into the orderly world of perfection, *Tikkun*."

Translated in simple English, the Rebbe's message to us was to do unconventional positive things, but to make them "fit" into the conventions of life. In short, our challenge today is to create the synthesis between the extremes of Judaism.

Acharei, the Answer

This explains the connection between the "Last Day of Passover" and the Torah reading of *Acharei.* Of all the days of Passover, the eighth and last day is associated with the future Redemption. Indeed, the explicit theme of the *Haftara* (Prophetic reading) taken from the Biblical book of Isaiah, Chapter eleven) is Moshiach, his qualifications and his impact on the world.

But how do we realize this goal? What is the spiritual dynamic of Moshiach? The Torah portion of *Acharei* furnishes us with the answer. Moshiach is about reaching for the stars, while never losing sight of the deceptively simple aspects of life.

Moreover, the lesson of *Acharei* is that not only does our need to scale the heights of spirituality not conflict with our sensitivity to the simple aspects of life, it increases our sensitivity.

Thus, the parsha concludes with the discussion of the prohibition against some of the most immoral forms of behavior. Precisely when we are reaching for the stars, we maintain our connection with the real world and guarantee that it remains pure and holy.

ESSAY NINE

RESPECT YOUR PARENTS AND BE HOLY

Respecting parents is the equivalent of respecting G-d, their partner in our creation.

Respecting the Shabbos is the equivalent of respecting G-d even as we indulge in the physical pleasures of life.

ESSAY NINE

RESPECT YOUR PARENTS AND BE HOLY

What is Holiness?

This week's parsha begins with the command to be holy. The entire parsha is named Kedoshim, which means holy. The idea of holiness in this parsha is obviously a general reference to being more G-dly and spiritual. Indeed, this is how the Torah describes holiness in this verse:

> "Speak to the entire assembly of the children of Israel and say to them, 'be holy, for I, G-d your G-d, am holy.'" Being holy is being more G-dly.

But, that is a very general definition of holiness. And since the Torah does not just present us with sweeping generalities, but also guides us with regard to the details, the question that we must address is: what is meant by holiness specifically?

It is reasonable to assume that the very first commandment the Torah provides in the verse that follows the one about being holy is what captures its essence.

Surprise!

And here is the surprising first example:

> "Each person shall revere his mother and father...!"

The Torah's primary example of holiness is amazingly one that is so down-to-earth and would never have entered our minds as an expression of holiness. Revering parents is such a rational and conventional commandment it hardly warrants referring to it as a means of becoming holy.

If the Torah would have provided examples that relate to the way we must shun the physical, restrict our pleasure or meditate and pray, we would have easily understood how these are illustrations of holiness. But revering and respecting our parents? How is this commandment an expression of holiness?

Negating Cultish Practices

On a simple level we can see how the Torah anticipated the various cults and religious orders that attacked family life and filial respect. In many cults, the first thing the new devotees are told is to sever their ties with their parents; that parents are agents of evil that seek to take them away from their devotion to their new religion.

Incidentally, when speaking of cults, it includes secular and political movements which compel its adherents to sever their ties with their families and friends.

And here the Torah tells us that, despite your desire to be holy and G-dly, you must not allow your spirituality and your strongly held beliefs get in the way of your relationship with your parents.

The Torah's Caveat

But the Torah is all about finding the proper balance. Lest one would entertain the notion that obedience to parents has no limits, the Torah continues in the very same verse that demands filial respect:

> "And you shall keep My Sabbaths, I am the G-d your G-d."

As Rashi explains that in this phrase the Torah forewarns us against following a parent's orders even if it conflicts with observing the Sabbath and other commandments. The Torah is therefore essentially telling us:

> "You and they are obligated to follow My commandments."

Hence, one's responsibility to one's parents does not override one's obligations to G-d.

According to this understanding of the connection between holiness and respecting parents, the respect due to parents is not, in and of itself, a manifestation of holiness; it just does not conflict with our pursuit of holiness. One could be holy and still respect one's parents.

Three Models of Holiness

On a deeper level, however, it seems that respecting parents is actually the most dramatic expression of holiness, and is therefore given as the first example of it.

Upon reflection, there are three models of holiness:

The first and most dramatic is to live in a spiritual world, where there are no distractions from earthly concerns. One who fasts and engages in prayer and Torah study all the time lives a holy life in the most literal sense of the word. This form of holiness involves showing reverence and submission to G-d. And while Judaism does not advocate a perpetual holy lifestyle of this order it does expect of us to devote some time to wholly holy (pun intended) endeavors. This approach applies to time of prayer, Holiday rituals, Yom Kippur etc.

The second and more pervasive form of holiness is to live every aspect of our normal lives in a way that elevates it to a higher plane. When we eat, we eat kosher food, recite a blessing before and after partaking of the food, and have the intention that the food will make us healthy and provide us with the energy to better serve G-d.

Two Salient Differences

The difference between these two forms of holiness is twofold:

In the first form the holiness is overt. Everyone can tell that the person is different and special. In the latter situation, however, an outsider cannot

necessarily detect that there is something different about this rather mundane act of eating. The holiness is within.

A second difference between the two forms of holiness is that in the former the holiness requires "leaving" the world behind; whereas the latter form of holiness requires of us to be in this world.

It is quite a feat to make the transition from a way of life that requires transcending the world to a way of life that demands involvement with and connection to it.

Third Form of Holiness: Synthesis

We therefore have a third form of holiness; one that combines the two other forms. Respecting and honoring one's parents is likened to reverence for G-d; the first form of holiness. But, at the same time, respecting parents does not take one out of the worldly element; on the contrary, it is the most efficient way for society to thrive. Without the connection between generations, we would not have continuity; just anarchy.

In short, filial responsibility is a composite of the two forms of holiness because it combines reverence

for G-d and His agents, our parents, with social responsibility and normal life.

Another Example of Holy Synthesis: Shabbos

However, respecting parents, while it has an element of attachment to G-d, the conscious sense is that one is doing something rational and socially responsible. The spiritual and G-dly element is not easily evident. This is why the Torah gives us another example of the synthesis where the G-dly and spiritual component is more pronounced, in the second part of the verse: the observance of the Sabbath;

Shabbos too creates a balance between the spiritual "otherworldly" form of holiness and the "worldly" manifestation of it.

On the one hand, Shabbos is a day when we desist from most forms of work, and we spend time in the synagogue praying etc., spiritual pursuits. And, on the other hand, Shabbos is a day when we are commanded to eat and have physical pleasure. Shabbos is therefore another example of the bridge between the two other forms of holiness.

But here the synthesis is even tighter. While we are eating and enjoying our meals we are mindful of the restrictions of Shabbos such as not cooking. Even as we engage the physical we are aware of the G-dly.

The Ultimate Shabbos

The Messianic Age is known as the Shabbos of creation. At that time, we will see the ultimate synthesis between the two forms of holiness, when, the Shabbos holiness will pervade all of our time and space. At that time we will not have any problem seeing the Divine in the ordinary and the temporal in the ethereal. The synthesis that we will experience will be a combination of the twin models of filial respect and respect for the Shabbos.

ESSAY TEN

HONORING AND REVERING PARENTS

Shabbos is our invitation to enter into *G-d's* "space."

Honoring parents invites G-d to enter into *our* space.

ESSAY TEN

HONORING AND REVERING PARENTS

Definition of Honor

The Torah commands us to both honor and revere our parents. Judaism's emphasis on a child's relationship to his parents is unparalleled. In the grouping of the Commandments known as the *Aseres Hadibros* (usually rendered as the "Ten Commandments," but more accurately described as the "Ten Statements") the word used is *kabed,* which is usually translated as "honor."

Our Oral Tradition tells us that *kabed* has a more focused meaning in this context, which is to provide our parents with their needs. In this week's parsha the term *tira'u* is used, which can be translated as fear or reverence. In the Oral tradition this is interpreted to mean, for example, that one may not say or do anything disrespectful to a parent.

Juxtaposed to Sabbath Observance

In this week's parsha, the Torah juxtaposes the commandment to revere a parent with the commandment to observe the Shabbos. Our Sages derive from this arrangement that a child may not listen to a parent who asks him to violate the Shabbos. Our Sages extended this understanding and stated further that one may never follow the instructions of a parent if they contradict any of the laws of the Torah.

What about the Ten Commandants?

A question has been raised why this lesson was not derived from the earlier juxtaposition of the two Commandments, to remember the Shabbos and honor our parents, found in Parshas Yisro. In the fourth of the Ten Statements, the Torah says, "Remember the Shabbos and keep it holy." It is followed by the fifth statement, "Honor your father and mother." Why do our Sages not make the same observation here that the reason these two commandments are juxtaposed is to teach us that honoring parents does not override observing the Shabbos?

Difference between Honoring and Revering

To answer this question we have to better understand the difference between honoring parents and revering them.

Although the word *kabed* is usually translated as honor, it actually implies a heaviness or "gravitas." We look at our parents as inherently possessing special qualities. However, the question may be raised, what if they are not that "heavy" in terms of their virtues and accomplishments? Why must they be honored regardless of their degree of worthiness?

A child must accord honor to a parent (unless the parent is a vile criminal) because the parent is a partner with G-d in the creation of the offspring. And, by honoring our parents we are vicariously honoring the Other Partner as well.

Our Space

Thus our Sages declare:

> "The honor due to parents is equivalent to the honor due to the Omnipresent."

The choice of the term "Omnipresent" as opposed to other names used for G-d indicates that parents are G-d's agents within **our** sphere of influence; they are

G-dly agents that pervade **our** space; they make G-d accessible to us just by virtue of being our parents.

Honoring Parents: The Bridge

We can now understand why the commandment to honor parents is the last one placed on the first Tablet.

The difference between the two Tablets (onto which the Ten Statements were etched) is that the first Tablet covers our relationship with G-d, whereas the second Tablet covers our relationship with our fellows. The last commandment in the first column then is the bridge between the two categories of commandments.

Honoring one's parents is certainly a moral imperative, expressing as it does gratitude for their involvement in our lives from our very creation through our development, education and maturation. It is much more than that though; it is our way of expressing our gratitude to G-d for "sharing" us with His partners, and giving us one more way of connecting to Him.

In Descending Order

The first Tablet lists the commandments in the descending order of the depth of our relationship with G-d that they express. This insight helps us understand why the fifth commandment follows the commandment to remember the Shabbos.

Shabbos is not just a holy day. When Shabbos enters, we are transported into G-d's "space." We are like guests are invited to the royal banquet at which the King Himself is present. Shabbos is clearly more intensely Divine than the honoring of parents.

The fifth and final commandment on the first Tablet is, conversely, where honoring our parents invites G-d to enter into **our** space. By demonstrating how we view our parents as G-d's partners we connect to G-d as well.

It is self-evident why Shabbos takes precedence over honoring our parents. If Shabbos is G-d's invitation to us to be in His space, it would be ludicrous for us to think that we can turn down His invitation and instead invite Him into our home!

Therefore there is no need to emphasize that Shabbos observance overrides honoring a parent. Howver, when discussing "reverence" for parents, there is a need to underscore that it does not take

precedence over Shabbos, as will be explained shortly.

Respect for Higher Authority

As stated, in this week's parsha the Torah refers to the commandment to have reverence for a parent.

Among other things, this commandment is meant to instill within us respect for a Higher authority. G-d is not visible to us so a child would be hard-pressed to grasp the notion of His authority without which no society can escape the ravages of anarchy. To inculcate the notion of authority, G-d gave us parents, who along with teachers and other authority figures, serve as models for the ultimate Authority, G-d.

Shabbos observance, where every detail of our behavior is regulated, makes us more conscious and conscientious of our obligations; it cultivates within us a profound respect for G-d. And if Shabbos is when we are invited into G-d's space, as discussed earlier, one is surely most attuned to obeying the king when one is in the king's own palace, sitting at his table.

In our parsha this week, the Torah reorders the presentation and cites the need for reverence for parents before the need to observe Shabbos. As physical beings, we are better suited to appreciate the role of authority when it is vested in tangible and visible human beings—our parents. Shabbos, by contrast, requires much contemplation and reflection to be aware of our presence in G-d's space.

Thus, one might be tempted to conclude that respect for a parent—the model for authority that leads to reverence for G-d, the ultimate Authority—takes precedence over the Shabbos. If the goal is respect for a higher authority then one might erroneously conclude that it makes more sense to let our filial duty override the observance of Shabbos.

However logical this conclusion may sound, the Torah dismisses this thought by juxtaposing the two commandments to instruct us that as important as it is for us to respect our parents, we may not allow that respect to get in the way of our other obligations to G-d.

The rationale for this conclusion is hinted in the next few words of the foregoing verse: "I am G-d your G-d." Rashi points out that the phrase was

intended to explain why one must not follow the instructions of a parent when it is in conflict with the Torah: "You and your father are obliged to honor Me." In other worlds, how could a father's will override G-d's will when the father is also obliged to follow G-d's will?

Honor in Reverse

As is often the case, another question can be raised here. Rashi's wording appears problematic. Rashi uses the word "honor": "You and your father are obliged to honor Me." If the issue is that the parental authority is subordinate to Divine authority Rashi should have stated: "Your parents are also obliged to **revere** Me." Why bring in the notion of honor when it is not the subject mentioned here?

One may base an answer to this question on a teaching of the Rebbe. The Rebbe observed that this law, that one may not listen to a parent's instruction to violate a commandment, is, ironically, codified by the author of the classic Shulchan Aruch-Code of Jewish Law in the laws of honoring parents. This suggests that when we do not follow our parents' will to break the law, we actually honor them.

When a child behaves improperly it can reflect on the parents and bring them dishonor, particularly if the child behaves badly at the behest of the parents. Conversely, when a child does the right thing, it brings honor to the parents.

We can now understand why Rashi refers to the parents' obligation to **honor** G-d too. It suggests that it brings honor to G-d when the child does what's right and, therefore, also honors the parents. In effect, doing the right thing does not demonstrate disregard for the parents; on the contrary, it brings them honor.

The Test of Leadership

This notion, that we may never infringe on G-d's will even for the sake of respecting another human, is what makes our belief in our leaders, particularly Moshiach the ultimate leader, unique. Our respect for them is exclusively due to their commitment to the will of G-d. If a leader, even a prophet, were to command us to stray one iota from Torah, we would know that it is our duty to reject his command. The leader is no less duty bound to honor G-d in the way G-d asked for us to honor Him.

Thus, our test for Moshiach will not be his ability to perform miracles. Rather, the test is whether he is totally committed to every detail and nuance of Torah. And to the extent that we follow G-d's will at his behest, we bring honor to him.

ESSAY ELEVEN

BE HOLY

Holiness is defined by our ability to live a G-dly existence in all aspects of life.

ESSAY ELEVEN

BE HOLY

The Unique Jewish View of Holiness

Holiness—the theme of one of the two *parshiyos,* we will read this Shabbat—is one of the objectives of virtually all religions. Yet is the way holiness is defined that sets the Jewish view of it apart from other systems of religious thought.

The section dealing with holiness, entitled *Kedoshim,* exemplifies the Jewish definition of being holy. Immediately after exhorting us to be holy, the Torah continues with the commandment to revere one's parents and to observe the Sabbath.

What is it about these two commandments—respecting parents and observing the Sabbath—that defines the Torah's view of holiness?

Before we can explain the connection between holiness and the Mitzvah to respect parents and observe the Sabbath, we must find a more precise

definition of the Hebrew word for holiness—*Kedusha*

Separation

Conventional wisdom tells us that a person who engages in spiritual and G-dly matters is a holy person. However, that would not be a totally accurate description of the word. The basis for this statement is the way the theme of *kedusha* is introduced at the end of this parsha that connects it with the Hebrew word: *havdalah*, which means "separation." Hence we know that *kedusha* is really the type of behavior that demonstrates that one is different and apart. And thus the commandment for us to be holy is to be different.

But the question can be raised: If by being different the Torah means we should observe the commandments that were given exclusively for the Jewish people, that would be redundant. The Torah has already commanded us to fulfill all these Mitzvot and there is no need to merely repeat them by saying we should be different. It is obvious that if we follow the Torah's laws to observe all of the commandments given to the Jewish people, that we will be different.

In truth, when the Torah says that we should be holy and different it means that even those aspects of life that would not distinguish us from any other person we were commanded to be different. This we do by performing all those similar activates in a totally different fashion.

For example, when a Jew eats, sleeps, engages in business, there might not be any inherent difference between the way a Jew who follows the Torah does this and with any other person who does the same.

And it is precisely here is where the Torah comes to tell us to be different even where there seems to be no difference.

Eat, sleep and do business in a manner that reflects one's Jewish perspective on life. Perform all these mundane activities because they are vehicles to be a better person and a better Jew. Live every day of your life in a way that pays tribute to our Creator. Do not limit your devotion to G-d in the hours spent praying, studying Torah and performing Mitzvot. Those are a given. Go beyond that which is mandated by the Torah; find ways of "surrendering" all that you have to G-d.

This does not mean that one should become an ascetic, but that in all our indulgences—permissible

ones to be sure—we should find a G-dly message and mission.

We are Connected!

To understand how it is possible for a human being to make G-d a part of our lives, the Torah therefore states: "Be holy for I am holy." Whoever we are, and in whichever state we may find ourselves, we are connected to G-d. Our true identities are G-dly. And we therefore have the ability to make every aspect of our lives G-dly.

We cannot, however, be content with living this life for oneself, but we must be prepared to impart this message of holiness, to be different even in areas where we are the same as others, to our children. Hence the commandment to be holy is followed by the establishing of the role of a child to respect his or her parents who are the first role models that a child will have.

Now that the Torah has commanded us to instill holiness into every aspect of our lives and impart this message to our children, the Torah proceeds to explain to us that one can accomplish this goal by observing the Shabbat.

Seeing G-d through Nature

When the Book of Genesis describes how G-d created the world in six days, the name *Elokim* is used exclusively. The name *Elokim* is numerically equivalent to the word *hateva*, which means nature.

Hence our ability to connect to G-d through our observation of G-d's role as a Creator is limited.

Moreover, from the vantage point of Elokim, there is an intrinsic separation between the Creator and the creation. At best one can realize that there is a Creator and follow His commandments, but to make the entire life of a person G-dly would appear to negate the very independent nature of one's natural existence.

Seeing G-d through Shabbos

Shabbos, by contrast, is the day that connects us to the dimension of G-dly energy that transcends nature, from which we derive the energy to transcend ourselves and thereby make every aspect of our lives G-dly and holy.

Our ability to transform the weekday into Shabbos cannot be complete, though, as long as we are in exile. Only when the Messianic Age will be ushered

in by Moshiach will we experience a perpetual Shabbos as the Talmud states.

It does not suggest that we will have to refrain from work all seven days of the week. Rather it means that all the ordinary days of the week will cease to be ordinary. We will enjoy each and every day because we will see the G-dly energy clearly revealed in everything we do or see. No more barriers will exist that separate between the Creator.

ESSAY TWELVE

LOVING YOURSELF

Self-Esteem should be replaced with Soul-Esteem, the true self

ESSAY TWELVE

LOVING YOURSELF

The Self-Esteem Industry

When the Torah commands us to "love your fellow as yourself," it is self-understood that one must love oneself. It is also self-evident that the Torah, which addresses itself to the average person, assumes that the average person does, in fact, love himself or herself.

Yet, in our own day and age, an entire industry has been spawned to deal with multitudes that lack even basic "self-esteem." It should also be noted, that with regard to the Jewish people in particular, our generation has witnessed an unprecedented manifestation of self-hatred on both the individual as well as on the communal and national level.

And the question can be raised, if a person has such a low regard, to the point of contempt, for himself or herself, how can they possibly love another?

Our True Self

In truth, a more basic set of questions must be raised:

First, how come people are so filled with hatred towards themselves?

And, secondly, why are we apparently seeing so much of this self-hating phenomenon in recent times?

To answer these twin questions, it must be stated at the outset that, by definition, one cannot possibly love oneself unless they also love the part of themselves that constitutes their true self.

For example, a person who suffers from amnesia, and knows that his new identity is not truly who he is, cannot really love his new identity. There will always be a gnawing need to discover his true self.

Another example closer to home: There were Jews who were taken away from their parents as little children, but who retained a vague memory of their childhood. There will frequently be a sense of a void in their lives; and only when they discover their true identity, will they feel good about themselves.

In a similar vein, we are much less aware of our own identity than our forebears. The material

resources we possess, the conflicts that arise from secular isms, the hedonistic and fleeting pleasures coupled with the sufferings that punctuate our lives, all serve to suppress awareness of our own inner soul. We are, literally, not in touch with who we are.

How can we love ourselves then, when we know that the "I" we are aware of is not the true I.

Ignorance of Self Leads to Fear

Lack of familiarity with someone can actually breed fear and then contempt; and so it is with our own estrangement from our souls. We begin to fear the G-dly spirit within us, shun it, deprive it of its needs and begin to abhor anything that reminds us of that "unknown" part of us—our neshama.

Thus, when the Torah exhorts us to "love our fellow as ourselves," the Torah is actually telling us: Discover who **you** are! And when you know and become familiar with yourself, you will love it. And when you realize that your fellow possesses, basically, the same neshama as you; you cannot help but to love him or her as well.

Solely, Soul Esteem

Our generation would do well to deemphasize the obsession with self-esteem. One does not have to tell someone to love oneself, if they knew who that self is. Instead we should expend our energies on developing "soul-esteem," learning to discover what is a neshama. Once we realize what we possess, nay who we are, the self-esteem and esteem of other will flow naturally.

Seeing the Light of Our Souls

As we have mentioned on so many occasions, it is clear from all of the Biblical, Talmudic etc. sources that we are living in momentous times: on the verge of witnessing the final Redemption. And precisely because we are so close to the light we see so much darkness and alienation, just as before the light of dawn it is very dark. All of this provides us with the final challenge to us: to break through the darkness and concealment.

One area of darkness, arguably more relevant and powerful than any other, is the darkness that prevents us from knowing our souls. Redemption on the individual level, which feeds into and is the catalyst for universal Redemption, is when we

acquire self-identification and love; when we become acutely aware of our souls and its needs. This, in turn, will lead us to a world of peace, because it will be pervaded with the realization of its neshama, G-d, within all of creation.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE "I LOVE MY FELLOW" VIRUS

The most difficult negative trait is envy.

The antidote to envy is loving our fellow as ourselves, the "Great Principle of Torah.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE "I LOVE MY FELLOW" VIRUS

A Fundamental Parsha Addressed to All

This week's Parsha Kedoshim, which literally translates as "be holy" is an eclectic one. Virtually every area of Jewish law governing every aspect of life has been mentioned in it. From the laws governing the agriculture to the law against wearing a mixture of wool and linen; from Sabbath observance to not spreading gossip and dozens more commandments make up this week's Torah reading.

Holiness in Judaism is not defined by the degree to which one divorces himself from the pleasures of life, but it is defined by the way one introduces a G-dly element into every facet of one's existence. Whether it is respecting parents because they are G-d's partners in our creation, or whether we do not stand idly by when our friend suffers, because each and every one of us is created in the image of G-d,

and we therefore treat human life with the utmost of respect, in either situation it is one's awareness of G-d that sensitizes us into doing the correct thing. This is holiness.

Based on the above, it is no wonder that our Sages referred to this parsha as a fundamental one that had to be told to the entire Jewish community. All of the Jewish people were gathered to hear this Parsha, one could say, because it is all encompassing.

All, but One, of the Ten Commandments

The Midrash also emphasizes the uniqueness of this parsha in that all of the Ten Commandments (more accurately; the Ten Statements) are represented in it.

The last commandment to not covet someone else's property is not mentioned explicitly, however, but, according to the Midrash, is alluded to by the commandment to love your fellow as yourself. As commentators explain, when one loves his fellow as himself he does not covet his property.

However, based on the omission of the last commandment because of its obvious nature, one can raise the following question:

Why then is there then a need to mention that one should not steal in this week's parsha? Once we are told that we should love our fellow as ourselves, we can derive virtually all of the other commandments that govern our behavior with others. One would never steal from the person that he loves as himself.

What then distinguishes the commandment not to steal from the one not to covet? In the latter, it was not mentioned because it is a corollary of the commandment to love the other, whereas the commandment not to steal is mentioned although it too can be adduced from the commandment to love the other. What is the special connection that exists between loving your fellow as yourself and the commandment not to covet another's property?

A Victimless Crime

There is a qualitative difference between the commandment not to covet and the commandments not to steal or commit murder. Unlike stealing and murder which cause obvious harm to the victim, coveting does not necessarily hurt anyone. For even if in the end coveting causes one to put pressure on the other to sell or give him the object that he covets, it is not something that is done against his

will.

So while theft or murder is certainly a repudiation of the commandment to love your fellow as yourself, these commandments possess an independent nature. The Torah commands us that even if I don't love someone intensely, I still must and can recognize that stealing and killing is the opposite of leading a holy and decent life.

Thus, the Torah mentions these commandments explicitly even though they can be derived from the general principle of loving your fellow as yourself for those who are not quite at that level.

By contrast, the Mitzvah not to covet is singularly derived from the principle of love. If not for the fact that we must love one another, one could imagine that coveting in and of itself is not a vice. It does not necessarily cause any harm. Only the Divine imperative to love one another can dictate that we should and would not covet that which is not ours.

Loving Your fellow Missing in the Ten Commandments

This explanation could also serve as an answer to the question as to why such a fundamental principle

as loving your fellow as yourself was not incorporated into the Ten Commandants.

In light of the above analysis, we can say that indeed, the 10th Commandment prohibiting coveting is, in fact, predicated on and a derivative from the imperative to love your fellow.

The Last Challenge

The last commandment not to covet embodies the final challenge of humanity.

From the beginning of human civilization, jealousy was ingrained into our psyche. Cain killed Abel because he was envious of him.

The last teaching of Maimonides in his Mishneh Torah discusses the last changes to occur in the Messianic Age. Among them is that there will be no more jealousy.

How does such a basic ingrained human flaw change?

The answer is that when our eyes will be opened to see the G-dly nature of our souls, we will recognize out inherent unity and see only the good in the other. And as explained above, when we fulfill the mitzvah of loving the other as ourselves we will no

longer be beset by envy and covetousness.

In these last days of Galus-exile our challenge is to prepare for the events of the Messianic Age. When we endeavor to awaken our love for our fellow human being and particularly when it is applied to one's family and the entire Jewish people — our extended family — we then create the ideal atmosphere to be receptive to G-d's blessings, the greatest of which is the imminent arrival of Moshiach to take us out of exile and usher in a period of eternal Kedoshim-holiness and unity.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

UNITY AND SEPARATION

The ultimate goal is not unity but unity within diversity.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

UNITY AND SEPARATION

Love and Not Mixing: Strange Combination

This week's Torah portion of Kedoshim contains one of the most – if not the most – fundamental precept of Judaism: "You shall love your fellow as yourself." Hillel told the prospective convert that "this is the entire Torah; the rest is commentary." Rabbi Akiva termed this Mitzvah "a great principle of Torah."

It is curious to see what commandment follows this so basic one. One would expect to find a commandment which would very clearly express some other lofty ideal. In fact, the very next verse exhorts us to not cross breed two distinct species of animals; not to sow two distinct species of plants and not to wear a garment which is made of both wool and linen.

What possible connection can there be between the Mitzvah of Ahavas Yisrael, loving one's fellow, and the ones that tell us not to mix the different species of animals, plants and fabrics?

Breaking Down Barriers and Erecting Others

The answer lies in a better understanding of one aspect of human weakness. When we are given a directive by the Torah, we are expected to fulfill it with enthusiasm and absolute dedication. It is not enough just to do it – although that is the most important part of a mitzvah – we must also see to it that our mindset is in complete harmony with the underlying thrust of the Mitzvah. In our situation, the Mitzvah of loving one another demands of us to remove all barriers that exist between two very different people.

And this is where there can be a pitfall.

When the Torah encourages us to break down barriers, we might follow this attitude in all areas of life. As a result there would be people who, in the name of love and unity, will eliminate necessary walls of separation without which the structure of Judaism cannot stand. Without the notion of separation, for example, there can be no difference

between the Sabbath and the week days. Without one's acceptance of the existence of legitimate differences, there can be no standards and ideals to strive for. If, after all everything is equal, whatever I do is good enough, why strive for something higher?

To avoid the danger of removing all barriers and divisions due to our commitment to the ideal of love and unity, the Torah follows the Mitzvah of loving your fellow as yourself with several Mitzvos, all of which relate to the need for a measure of separation. This ensures the integrity of all of G-d's creatures, commandments and standards.

When we reflect more deeply on the need for separation we will see that not only doesn't it conflict with unity it guarantees true unity.

If everything was uniform it would not only be bland and boring it would not prove true unity because it is not tested unity. Tested unity is when people of different personalities are able to unite and discover that there is an inherent unity that unites them despite of their differences.. Moreover, their differences create a beautiful harmonious blend that makes their unity so much more attractive and authentic

A Balancing Act

To be sure, to achieve both - unity and separation - is a balancing act which is by no means easy to perform. However, our efforts to do both - love uncompromisingly and never sacrifice principle in the process - will bear fruit. Our efforts now will usher in the Messianic Age, when we will experience the most profound peace and unity and an appreciation for the multifarious levels of holiness-unity and separation at their best. (See following essay for further discussion of the synthesis of unity and separation.)

ESSAY FIFTEEN

VIVE LA DIFFÉRENCE

All of the different classes of non-Jew, Jew, Kohain, Levi, Yisroel will remain in the Messianic Age even as we will experience the greatest feeling of unity

ESSAY FIFTEEN

VIVE LA DIFFÉRENCE

Unity and Peace; Most Coveted Ideal

One of Judaism's most fundamental teachings is the Mitzvah that appears in this week's Torah portion Kedoshim, to "love your fellow as yourself." Rabbi Akiva stated that this is a major principle of the Torah. The great sage Hillel said that this commandment is the essence of the whole Torah, the rest is commentary. The importance of unity and peace in Judaism cannot be overstated.

All of our prayers are replete with references to peace. The Amidah - our most important prayer – concludes with a request of G-d to grant us peace. "Bless us, our Father, all of us together," we declare in that prayer, suggesting that G-d's blessing can only be realized when all of us stand together, united. The Talmud concludes with the statement:

> G-d could not find a vessel that can contain His blessings other than peace, as it is stated: "G-d gave His nation strength, G-d blessed His nation with peace."

It is thus ironic that the Torah follows up the mitzvah that epitomizes the concept of unity, to "Love your fellow as yourself," with the precepts – that reflect the need for separation – to not cross-breed two species of animals and to not wear a garment that contains a mixture of wool and linen.

Underlying these two commandments, the great sage Nachmanides says, is the concept that G-d created a world in which there are disparate forces. G-d wants us to respect these separations.

Why does the Torah juxtapose these two seemingly opposite imperatives? Why does it express the need for unity and then follow it up with commandments that exhorts us to maintain and preserve separation? (See preceding essay.)

Uprooting Mixtures and Uniting with Half-Shekel

We find a similar phenomenon in the Mishnah. During the month of Adar, the month that precedes Passover, there was a need for the Jewish courts to

enforce two practices. The courts had to collect the half-shekel for the Temple. In addition they were required to insure that there were no forbidden mixtures of plants growing in Israel.

The precept to give the half-shekel dramatizes how each one of us is only a half, who cannot be made whole without our connection with the other individual. Only unity can make us complete. Conversely, the prohibition against mixing different species of plants symbolizes the very opposite sentiment, that it is crucial for two distinct forces to remain distinct by keeping them separated. How do we reconcile these opposite teachings, and why does the Torah discuss these two diametrically opposite teachings – of unity and separation – together?

The Limits of Unity

On a simple level, the Torah wishes to instruct us that unity has its limits. For example: The Torah's advocacy of love does not mean we should fraternize with criminals and learn from their behavior. Ethics of the Fathers admonishes us to "Keep the distance form a bad neighbor and do not fraternize with a wicked person."

There must always be a point of demarcation between good and evil, light and darkness etc., as expressed so eloquently in our Havdalah ("separation") service at the end of the Sabbath.

The Ultimate Ideal of Unity

On a deeper level, the answer to these questions lies in a better understanding of what is true unity and peace.

True unity is not experienced when two people have no differences of opinion and are temperamentally similar. While this situation is preferable to discord and conflict between individuals, it does not define the true nature of unity. True unity can be realized only when we recognize the differences that exist in our creation; differences that were created by G-d and therefore are part of His scheme.

Once we appreciate the inherent value of the individual creation, the imperative of unity dictates that we should realize that underlying the differences is a Divine oneness that pervades and therefore unites everything in existence.

Marriage

The perfect analogy for the need for separation within unity is marriage.

On the one hand, the Zohar tells us that marriage is the reunion of two half souls that were separated at birth.

On the other hand, we are told that male and female are not just biologically different but also spiritually. Marriage brings to disparate and often opposite spiritual energies together to form a perfect union.

The Ultimate Marriage

The ultimate marriage and level of unity will be experienced in the Messianic age. What began as Mount Sinai as our betrothal to G-d will be consummated during the Messianic Age.

It will be a perfect marriage precisely because all of our individual talents will be revealed to their fullest at that time. Once our colors and hues are sharp and powerful, our unity will also be more powerful because we will realize the interdependent nature of our souls.

Moreover, in the Messianic Age we will also fully appreciate how the G-d made differences are all manifestations of a unified divine scheme.

Our sages tell us that in the Messianic Age there will be Jews and non-Jews. Non-Jews will be the best human beings can be; their full potential will be realized. Jews will be Jews to the fullest extent and their full potential will be actualized.

The divisions of Kohain, Levi and Yisroel will remain, a Kohain will be the most he can be, etc. Simultaneously; we will experience the greatest force of unity. In the words of the prophet Zephaniah (3:9):

> "..all shall call upon the name of G-d and serve Him will one consent."

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE GREAT PRINCIPLE

Love and Unity are the catalysts that bring us to the Final Redemption

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE GREAT PRINCIPLE

Why is "Loving Your fellow as Yourself" a Great Principle?

"Love your fellow as yourself," Rabbi Akiva said, "is the great principle of the Torah."

There is also a well know story in the Talmud of the prospective convert who asked Hillel to convert him. The prospective convert then sets a condition for his conversion, "that Hillel teach him the whole Torah while standing on one leg." Hillel's response was:

> What is hateful to you do not do to others; the rest is commentary. Go and learn [the rest].

Once more, our oral tradition magnifies the importance of this one commandment and deems it central and fundamental to the observance of all the others.

One may wonder as to the need for this "great principle," and how does Hillel justify his claim that this Mitzvah is the entire Torah, the rest is commentary?

Furthermore, if this commandment is so central, why wasn't it included in the Ten Commandments?

How can we Realistically Observe the Social Mitzvos?

To answer all these questions, let us go back to the verses preceding, "Love your fellow as yourself." Immediately before commanding us to love one another, the Torah gives us specific commandments such as not to be a tale bearer, not to stand idly when others are in danger, not to take revenge or to bear a grudge.

When we try to observe each one of these commandments separately, we will discover the difficulty that accompanies them. Imagine a person hears a juicy piece of gossip about another and has an opportunity to tell it to someone. What is the likelihood that they will not do so, the Torah's commandment to the contrary notwithstanding?

What is the likelihood of forgetting or ignoring what another had done to you?

These commandments go against human nature. How can we ever expect of normal and healthy humans to overcome the need to share gossip with others and to not bear grudges?

Furthermore, if one does, on occasion, succeed in suppressing one's inner desire to share gossip, bear a grudge, and the like, what is going on in one's thoughts? Not *speaking* ill of another does not guarantee that one will not *think* ill of another. And while, technically speaking, one has not violated any law if they keep their slanderous remarks to themselves; nevertheless, it is detrimental to the soul to even maintain negative thoughts about others.

According to the alter Rebbe, thinking evil, though not necessarily a crime, affects the soul adversely, even more so than an occasional 'slip of the tongue' negative remark.

How does one then realistically observe these almost impossible commandments?

The Great Principle is the Answer

The answer is "Love your fellow as yourself." The Alter Rebbe in his classic Chassidic work, the Tanya (Chapter 32), teaches us to realize that your fellow possesses a soul which is a part of G-d. Realize that your soul and his or her soul have a common source. Realize that what separates the two of you is only the body; but, insofar as your true essence – your soul – is concerned, you are essentially connected, united and one.

With this perspective of who the other person is in relation to yourself, we do not have to struggle to artificially suppress our desire to speak evil of another. After all, he or she is my brother or sister; she or he is a part of me. How can I speak ill of someone who is really an extension of myself?

In addition, when one develops this awareness of the centrality of one's soul, then it enables the person to observe all of the commandments, even those whose focus is on man to G-d relationships.

Not Just a Lofty Altruistic Ideal

If the Torah had introduced this commandment at the very beginning, or, in the Ten Commandments,

people might have concluded that it is a lofty and unattainable goal, which has no bearing on everyday living.

By inserting this "great principle" within the specific commandments concerning inter-personal relationships, the Torah thereby underscores how it is absolutely crucial to work on this level of love in order to observe some of the most basic laws.

The Teachings of Chassidus

How does one reach this level of love? The most straightforward approach is to study the teachings of the Torah that deal with unity. Of all the different disciplines within Torah the teachings of Chassidus, the soul of Torah, is most suited to expose the soul of every Jew.

We can now understand why these teachings were revealed in recent generations although all teachings of Torah were contained within the Torah that was given at Mount Sinai.

Since the Messianic Age is about bringing all of the Jewish people together in the Land of Israel, it is imperative that we foster true unity as a way of paving the way for that unity.

Our sages have assured us that fulfillment of this "great principle: is the greatest catalyst for all of G-d's blessings, especially the greatest blessing - the complete and true redemption, through our righteous Moshiach!

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

REVENGE IS NOT VERY SWEET

The key to healing our divisions is to defuse conflicts.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

REVENGE IS NOT VERY SWEET

No to the Snow-Mobile

One of the Torah's commandments that govern human relationship is the one against taking revenge. This commandment is quickly followed by the one not to harbor a grudge.

Rashi, citing the Talmud explains these two commandments with an example of a person who tries to borrow a snow-mobile from his neighbor. His neighbor refuses.

A few weeks later, the neighbors snow-mobile breaks down so he comes to the first person—who by now had already purchased a snow-mobile—and asks him whether he can lend him the snow-mobile. His answer is, "No way! You didn't want to lend me yours when I needed it. I will not lend you mine."

That is revenge.

A second scenario is where the first person who was turned down does agree to lend his neighbor his snow-mobile with the added caveat: "I'm not like you. You wouldn't lend me your snow-mobile when I needed it, but I will lend you mine."

This is bearing a grudge.

A Slippery Slope

Maimonides explains the reason for not bearing a grudge that it is a precautionary measure against revenge. If people would bear grudges it might lead down the slippery slope to taking revenge.

This is one of a select example of where the Torah forbids one thing to prevent another violation. This type of commandment is usually something the rabbis would do, but is almost non-existent in Biblical law.

The fact that this precautionary measure does exist here is a sign that the Torah considered revenge to be more serious than most other transgressions for which the Torah did not legislate additional precautionary measures.

What is it about revenge that has to be avoided at any cost?

Cycle of Violence

The simple approach to this is that an act of revenge will lead to the attacker's reprisals that will in turn provoke a stronger response. This cycle of violence can lead to catastrophic consequences.

Needless to mention, that the topic of revenge must be distinguished from legitimate self-defense. Indeed, this week's parsha also commands us "not to stand idly on the blood of our fellow." This the Talmud explains means that we must do whatever we can to protect someone's life, even to kill the attacker. But it is important to distinguish between attacking to prevent an attack and attacking for the sake of revenge.

Upping the Ante

One could suggest a deeper explanation for the Torah's extreme position concerning bearing a grudge and revenge. When a civilized person does something to harm another, he or she usually feels a certain amount of guilt for having caused that harm.

Even if there was a reason for the assault or the insult, a normal person often recognizes that his or her reaction was not justified. So when the person offended does nothing, time and calmer heads contribute to the diffusing of the situation.

When the other takes revenge, however, he ups the ante, and the dispute takes on a life of its own, because now both parties begin to convince themselves that they are fighting a holy war.

When people have arguments and they begin to ascribe "higher" motives to their own personal agendas, there is little chance that their dispute will ever be resolved.

And, once again, it should be noted, that we're not discussing legitimate differences of opinion or ideological differences between different groups. We are discussing when these differences of opinion convert into hatred and recriminations. Even if they were originally based on some principles, they quickly deteriorate into personal animosity and endless fights that have nothing to do with principle.

Preparing for Moshiach the Right Way

The Talmud predicts that before Moshiach ushers in the Age of Redemption, when true peace and unity will prevail, there will be much fragmentation and division within the Jewish community.

Unfortunately this prophecy has come true and though it is a harbinger of Moshiach it is not one that we should relish because when Moshiach comes to save us from ourselves, he comes in spite of us.

By contrast, when we bring unity and peace (which does not mean that we ought to compromise our values for the sake of peace, but to remove any trace and tinge of hatred to the other because of our differences) we become part of the process that makes the Redemption possible.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

WHICH WAY SHALL WE GO?

Why is there so much juvenile crime and violence now?

The answer lies in the exposing of powerful youthful energy before Moshiach.

Parents and teachers have the responsibility to steer this energy in the right direction.

They should not ignore it or suppress it.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

WHICH WAY SHALL WE GO?

The Root Cause

We have lived through a difficult week. As it stands now, two — perhaps more – high school students murdered thirteen of their fellow students and teachers. The entire country is in shock. Everyone — Parents, students, psychologists and sociologists are grappling with this tragedy. Why? Why would any human being commit such atrocities? Many theories have been advanced, most of which have validity. But, few of these theories deal with the root cause.

From the Torah's perspective, we could ask how does the Torah view the young criminal and on whose shoulder to the Torah put the blame.

Perhaps an even more urgent question has to be asked. How could we, in such an advanced stage of our history, moments before the final and complete Redemption, be plagued with such a horrific

phenomenon of school children committing the most heinous of crimes?

"You shall not eat with the blood."

Although it is impossible to adequately answer such painful questions, we must attempt to offer a few thoughts on this matter. By Divine Providence, this week's Torah portion refers to the young criminal, albeit, tangentially:

We are commanded: "You shall not eat with the blood." These words seem puzzling. Didn't the Torah already tell us that we should not consume blood. What new law does the Torah wish to convey in this verse?

The Talmud and Maimonides provide several explanations. One of them is that we are prohibited to eat in a way that can lead to bloodshed. This is a reference to the "*Ben Soreh U'Moreh*, the rebellious son" who steals meat and wine, consumes them gluttonously. According to the Torah in Deuteronomy (21:20) this rebellious child is to be executed because his rather brazen behavior will inevitably lead to more serious crimes, including murder.

Childhood Criminal Behavior: Who's to Blame?

Now, despite the fact that the Talmud says, no one was ever executed for this type of crime, the Torah nevertheless wishes to teach us a lesson about childhood criminal behavior.

According to Maimonides and *Chinuch* (a medieval classic exposition of the 613 Commandments) it is the fault of the parents who are too permissive and permit him to lead a irresponsible life. This prohibition, "You shall not eat with the blood" admonishes the parents to make sure their children do not lead a life that will lead to crime.

Maimonides, clearly, obviously puts the blame on the lack of proper moral education when the child is still young.

Why Now?

But, the question still persists. Why are we being exposed to such an avalanche of violent acts committed by teenagers and even younger children? At this point, at the threshold of the twenty–first century, haven't we matured sufficiently that we no longer should have such evil in our midst? And as mentioned before, how is it that we witness such

terrible violence by our youth so close to the coming of Moshiach?

One might suggest that it is precisely because we are on the verge of making the most dramatic transition into the world of Redemption that we are experiencing these problems.

Two Scenarios

We find two varied accounts of the nature of children in the time before Moshiach. The prophet Malachi has predicted that before the Messianic Age, the young will restore the hearts of their fathers to G-d. They will be more spiritually in touch and holier than their parents.

Yet, the Talmud also predicts that before the Messianic Age the young will act brazenly and embarrass their elders.

Both of these statements can be literally true. While youth today are endowed with more spiritual energy than their forebears, they still have the ability to choose to use it for good or for evil. They can either restore the hearts of their fathers, or they can vent uncontrollable evil energy.

Our responsibility as parents in this pivotal period of transition is thus more crucial than ever before. We can steer our children in the wrong direction by neglecting their moral development, and anticipate an unleashing of our children's potential in an uncontrolled and unG-dly manner. We can also guide them in the right direction and be surprised to discover that they possess far stronger positive energy than we ever imagined.

Such a level of parental involvement will certainly lead to the realization of that prophecy that in this age the prophet Elijah shall come and "restore the hearts of the fathers through the children."

ESSAY NINETEEN

STAND UP FOR US

Honest introspection demands that we don't overlook our flaws.

Honest introspection also demands that we don't overlook our qualities and virtues.

If this is true for every individual it is certainly true for our people as a whole.

ESSAY NINETEEN

STAND UP FOR US

Respect for Age

Respect for elders is one of the many commandments that appear in this week's Parsha. And although respect can be shown in many ways, the Torah commands us to show respect by standing up for the elderly.

The Talmud discusses the issue as to whether one has to stand up for an elderly person who is uneducated. The conclusion is yes. And the rationale for this conclusion is "there were many of life's experiences that he went through."

From this answer we learn that education is not just what one learns from a text or a teacher. One also acquires useful knowledge just from living through and experiencing life.

Respect for the Old and Young Jewish People

If this is true about an individual then it is also true of a people. A nation that has gone through years, decades, centuries and even millennia is, by Torah's definition, an aged nation for whom one must have respect. When that nation has also been subjected to a multitude of experiences such as oppression on the one hand and miraculous deliverance on the other, this nation is certainly worthy of much respect.

Even if occasionally that nation falls short of the mark with respect to formal scholarship, it is comparable to the elderly person who should be respected even if he lacks formal education.

This introduction will serve as a rationale for the exalted position of the Jewish people today, despite the low grades we might get for our scant collective knowledge of Judaism in the current era.

Our generation is truly the most unique of any generation in Jewish history, not because we have greater intellectual sophistication and spiritual prowess, but because we are a people that has gone through an intensive course of nation-building experiences in the University of Life.

Every Jew, notwithstanding his or her level of

knowledge or observance, is an honor student in this institution we call life, because we are not just individuals but members of a chain of tradition and experience that goes back 4,000 years to the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Of course, in many other respects we are a youthful and radically new generation in the positive sense of the word. Never before have so many Jews withstood the test of affluence and the allure of modernity and remained faithful to Judaism. But even where we failed individually, we collectively are deserving of respect because of our advance age and experience.

No such thing as a Jew without any Background

A prominent Jewish leader once bragged to the Lubavitcher Rebbe that he organized a Holiday service for "hundreds of Jews who have no background." While the Rebbe certainly appreciated his efforts to inspire Jews and bring them closer to Jewish practice, the Rebbe lovingly corrected his characterization of these Jews as being "Jews without any background." The Rebbe remarked to him,

> "There is no such thing as a Jew without any background. Every Jew is a descendent of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob!"

This message is particularly poignant now that the Jewish people are going through hard times because of what is happening in Israel. The Jewish people are at the receiving end of much criticism for various things that we are rightly or wrongly (most of the time: wrongly) accused of.

Occasionally, some of this criticism—though unwarranted and, considering where it comes from, hypocritical—can get to us, causing feelings of depression and demoralization.

Self-Respect as Well

The lesson we can learn from this week's parsha's commandment to stand up for the elderly is that it is high time that the entire world should stand for the Jewish people.

Let the whole world recognize that we—the Jewish people— have gone through thousands of years of persecution and a multitude of other experiences that have made us a unique nation. Of course, our collective scholarship, commitment to the Torah, dedication to the virtues of goodness and kindness that has no parallel over the ages, contributed immensely to our stature as a nation. However, even where we are lacking in one area or another, our

collective historical experience accords us the right to demand the proper respect.

However, before we can demand and expect the respect that we deserve from others, we must have self-respect.

Argue with G-d?

With the renewed appreciation for our special status, we can then come before G-d—particularly in these troubled times— and demand that He too stand up for His people. We may justifiably say to G-d: "We, the Jewish people, have gone through innumerable and extraordinary experiences that have forced most other nations into oblivion. We have thus—by virtue of our historical education—graduated cum-laude from the University of life.

We thus have every right and, indeed, obligation—as we do in our prayers three times daily—to ask, plead and even demand of You, G-d, to follow Your own law that states, 'Before the elderly you shall rise.' "

G-d Fulfills the Mitzvah of Standing before the Elderly

How does G-d fulfill this Mitzvah?

When G-d brings and end to the subjugation of the Jews by other nations and causes them to appreciate and respect the Jewish people, if only for their collective history of travail, then G-d and the entire world will in effect, be standing up for the Jewish people.

For G-d to fulfill this Mitzvah properly, He must and will, bring an end to the degradation and suffering we have to endure in exile, by bringing our righteous Moshiach, who will usher in an age of true peace.

ESSAY TWENTY

THEFT IN THE SINGULAR AND IN THE PLURAL

Moral decisions have to involve the realization of what our actions cause collectively and individually.

ESSAY TWENTY

THEFT IN THE SINGULAR AND IN THE PLURAL

Two Forms of Theft

Among the plethora of commandments in this week's parsha we find the commandment not to steal. Our Sages tell us that this commandment is not a repetition of the one that was stated in the Ten Commandments. There it refers to the prohibition against kidnapping, whereas in our parsha it refers to theft of property.

When we compare the way the Torah presents these two forms of theft it is clear that they are different in yet another way. The commandment not to steal in that appears in the Ten Commandments is written in the singular form "*Lo Tignov.*" By contrast, the commandment in this week's parsha—which is directed against the theft of property—is presented in the plural form: "*Lo Tignovu.*" Since every detail of the Torah is precise there must be a reason why the Torah changes the tenses. Moreover, there must be a reason why kidnapping is stated in

the singular form whereas theft of money is stated in the plural.

One simple way of explaining the change from singular to plural lies in the qualitatively different nature of these two crimes. Frequently, we hear of people who attempt to justify financial crimes such as petty larceny, or at least find some rationalization as to why it is not so serious.

Stealing One Apple?

To illustrate: A poor person might feel the justification to steal one apple from a major supermarket with the rationalization that it won't cause anyone any real harm. The billionaire owners of the supermarket will never miss that lone apple. It will have zero impact on their bottom line. In his mind there are no real victims. So why should he, the impoverished individual, not benefit from others' wealth, much of which will go to waste anyhow.

On the other hand, one would be hard pressed to find a rational person who might try to rationalize kidnapping or murdering another with this rationale. Even a gravely ill person will not justify killing another to obtain an organ for transplantation. One would find it much more

difficult to legitimize stealing a child from his or her parents than it would be to steal money or any other ephemeral benefit.

How do we refute the abovementioned rationalization of the would-be thief or those within society that find some justification for the crime of theft?

Obviously, the ultimate repudiation of theft is the Torah's proscribing it. But, with regard to the rational laws known as Mishpatim, the Torah wants us to understand these laws and not just accept them on faith. These commandments are singled out to be included in the category of rational commandments because G-d wants us to not just follow them but that they should resonate within us. In Maimonides' words, a person who desists from committing a crime because he is repulsed by it is superior to the one who is tempted to do it but only desists because it is against the law.

The Rational Argument

What then is the rational argument against petty theft?

The argument is that if something that is right for one person to do it would also have to be right for two or more people to do. In fact, if it's acceptable for one person to commit petty larceny then it should be acceptable for **everyone** to do the same. Now if that would indeed occur—that everyone would take advantage of the rational argument that justifies stealing one apple—all the apples of the world that are for sale would be pilfered. And why stop at apples? In short, it would cause the collapse of the world's economy and would ultimately lead to anarchy, mass starvation, wars and all other undesirable consequences.

To underscore this point the Torah speaks of theft in the plural to alert the potential thief—and his supporters—of the consequences of this crime when it si in the plural. This enables these individuals to realize the obvious that if **many** people pilfer it would be disastrous for all. Thus it is forbidden for anyone to commit that crime. To think about the crime in the plural helps us recognize the fallacy of the thought process that minimizes the severity of the crime.

With respect to the capital crime of kidnapping—as with respect to murder—the Torah has no need to speak in terms of mass murder or kidnapping to

make the potential criminal desist. Even the singular violation of these heinous crimes ought to be quite repulsive to most sane individuals. For the psychopath who is not deterred from committing this crime, putting it in the plural will not be any more convincing. Hence the Torah prefers to state these commandments in the singular to underscore the seriousness of the crime even when it affects the commission of the crime by one person. And this conclusion is just as logical and true even if there would be a guarantee that it would not affect another individual.

Two Approaches to the Performance of One Mitzvah

From the above analysis we may glean that there are two ways to view every Mitzvah that we have the ability to perform.

There are times when we must reflect on the aggregate effect of our good deeds. Perhaps, we may argue rationally, that doing one more Mitzvah is not going to change the world. How can one insignificant act of one insignificant person bring Moshiach?

The response to this question is twofold:

First, when we perform a Mitzvah we must view its performance as being one that Jews from all over the world are also performing. To desist from the Mitzvah because one person's contribution has little value can be compared to the story of the wine maker who poured water into the communal wine barrel thinking that one cup of water will not adulterate the barrel full of wine. The problem is that all of the wine makers thought alike...

To desist from doing a Mitzvah that we have the opportunity to perform is a form of theft. We are stealing the opportunity to bring the world a step closer to the final Redemption when all of the ills of the world will be rectified. To delay that process by not performing a Mitzvah may be considered petty larceny when only one person thinks that way, but it deals a catastrophic blow to the world if everyone thinks this way.

The second argument is that, in fact, there is no such thing as an insignificant Mitzvah. In truth, each and every Mitzvah—which is an expression of G-d's will—has cosmic and infinite G-dly power. Furthermore, that one Mitzvah can be the proverbial straw that will break the back of Galut/exile and

usher in the Redemption. Failure to do one Mitzvah is to perform the act of kidnapping because every Mitzvah places us in G-d's domain. Failure to do that Mitzvah "kidnaps" us and transfers us into the un-G-dly domain referred to in Kabbalah as the "Sitra Achara-the Other Side," and is the spiritual equivalent of stealing a person and selling him or her.

Our mission in these last moment of exile is thus to think in terms of our individual efforts being simultaneously part of a universal thrust to bring Moshiach and Redemption, as well as having the explosive power of many megatons of spiritual nuclear energy. Combined, they will surely hasten the process of the Redemption and make the world receptive to the changes that will occur in this process.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

EXILE IS NOT A CURSE?!

It is axiomatic in Judaism, that when a person is given a challenge, he or she is also given the ability to meet that challenge.

Ours is the challenge of Galus.

We have the capacity to meet that challenge by bringing the Redemption!

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

EXILE IS NOT A CURSE?!

Enigmatic Commandments

Two of the commandments in this week's parsha are enigmatic because of their obviousness. And taken at face value these admonitions are rather unusual because they are so obvious.

> "Do not curse a deaf person; and do not put a stumbling block before the blind."

Our Sages explain that, in truth, these commandments apply to everyone. We may not curse people who are not deaf and we many not place stumbling blocks before people who are not blind. Yet the Torah sought to teach us these laws specifically by applying them first and foremost to the deaf and blind.

If the Torah does not want us to curse anyone, it should have simply stated "do not curse." Period!

Is there anyone in his right mind that would think that it is acceptable to curse a deaf person simply because he or she cannot hear the curse?

The same question can be posed with regard to placing a stumbling block before the blind. Couldn't the Torah—which phrases laws so concisely, in the interest of not writing an unnecessary word or even letter—have stated: "Do not place stumbling blocks before others?" And while Rashi, quoting the Talmud, explains that it refers to giving an unsuspecting person bad advice, it could have conveyed that idea even if it would have left out the word "blind."

In short, why highlight that the victims of one's curses and stumbling blocks are deaf and blind? And what relevance does it have to our own lives, most of us, who would never entertain committing such a heinous sin?

Heightened Spirituality

It is well established that people who lack certain physical abilities—such as blindness—compensate by having more of the other senses and faculties. A blind person will often have a more sensitive sense of hearing or of touch etc.

In truth, this physical reality, where the challenged person compensates, is a reflection of a spiritual advantage that he or she possesses. The physically challenged person is actually in possession of more sensitive spiritual capabilities.

This assertion is based on at least two factors and manifests itself in two ways:

First, it is axiomatic in Judaism, that when a person is given a challenge, he or she is also given the ability to meet that challenge. Thus, when a person suffers from a physical disability it means that he or she has the potential to overcome it with enhanced spiritual powers.

Second, a blind person in Talmudic jargon is called a *sagi nahor*, which literally means "one who has an abundance of light." Chassidic sources explain that it is not just a euphemism—indeed, the world for euphemism in modern Hebrew is *sagi-nahor*—it describes the reality that the blind person has an abundance of light. The blindness is not a consequence of too little light, but of the imbalance caused by light not being able to express itself in the limited physical organ; there is too much light of the soul for the limited physical capabilities of the eye.

In other words, not only does G-d give the blind—and all other forms of physical challenges—greater spiritual energy to compensate with their loss. In addition, the reason why there is a disability in the first instance is the enhanced spiritual energy this individual possesses.

Exile Deafness and Blindness: A Challenge

What is true of people with physical challenges is also true for the Jews of exile. Physical disabilities and challenges are a metaphor for our spiritual challenges.

Our status of exile Jews can be described in terms of both deafness and blindness.

Everyday there is a heavenly voice that emerges from Mount Sinai that beckons us to get closer to G-d and His Torah. Living in exile has prevented us from hearing this message. The sound of Sinai that reverberates through the cosmos to this day is ignored by most people as a result of our existence in galus/exile.

Everyday there are miracles that surround us, demonstrating G-d's active involvement in our world. Many of the modern day miracles we have

experienced even surpass the Biblical miracles. We just don't see them; we are blind. We are in exile.

And lest one would think that being in exile and lacking the spiritual capacity to hear the cosmic Divine music and see the Divine in every aspect of life is a curse, the Torah tells us otherwise: By commanding us not to curse the deaf, the Torah is thereby declaring: Exile is not a curse!

At face value, this assertion sounds preposterous! Why do we devote countless prayers to bring an end to exile? How can we reconcile this claim with all that we know and experienced about the calamity that it exile?

Complementary Truths

In truth, our heartfelt pleas for the end of exile and the claim here that exile is not a curse are not contradictory; they are complementary.

The Rebbe explained (Sefer Hasichos 5752, Tazria-Metzora) that exile is a time that contains incredible spiritual energies that are so potent that we cannot contain them. And because we cannot contain, absorb and properly internalize this energy it manifests itself in rather negative ways to the extent

that it can pose serious challenges to us. It is like the excessive light of the blind person, which overwhelms his system and causes the disability.

How do we meet the challenge?

The Rebbe explains that we meet the challenge not by negating exile but by recognizing and discovering the enhanced spiritual energy it possesses. Our spiritual deafness and blindness that is a product of exile, in and of itself, is not a curse. The curse is when we view exile strictly as a curse and see only the negativity and not the hidden spirituality and opportunity.

Moreover, the more we think we are deaf and blind to the G-dly reality of exile, the more it reinforces the notion that G-d would not give us a challenge that we are not capable of meeting. The lower it seems that we are falling and stumbling in exile the greater the capacity we have to get back up and march confidently and uprightly towards the Redemption.

So rather than "curse" the state of spiritual deafness and blindness that punctuates our existence in exile; recognize the true nature of the period in which we find ourselves.

So while, on the surface it seems that this "exile embracing" approach contradicts the imperative that we clamor for getting out of this exile, nothing can be further from the truth!

The Rebbe explained that getting out of exile is in actuality an exercise of revealing exile's inherent spiritual loftiness. The Rebbe has repeatedly stressed how the word for exile/*golah* needs only the insertion of the letter *aleph* to turn the word into *Geulah*/Redemption. This implies that we need not negate *golah*, we simply need to expose it true nature.

Reinterpreting the Verse

In this light, let us now reinterpret the words of the Torah:

"Do not curse a deaf person":

Do not tell the spiritually deaf who suffer from *galus*-itus that they are cursed. Instead, show them how they possess certain qualities and capabilities that were not even present in the days of the Beis Hamikdash.

It is interesting to note, that the word in Hebrew for a deaf person is *cheresh*. This word has the same

numerical value as the word *Chukas*, which refers to the most esoteric and spiritual commandments of the Torah, which we cannot fathom. This, perhaps, is a hint that the deaf person is connected to a higher consciousness; one that relates to the more spiritual and Divine aspects of Judaism.

> "Do not place a stumbling block before the blind":

Do not tell the spiritually blind, that they cannot grow in their spiritual lives. Do not give them the message: "you are disabled by exile blindness and as a result, try as you may, you cannot help but to continually stumble. Not only will you not grow, you will fall even lower." The Torah, in the above verse, wants us to repudiate this negative message.

Open Your Eyes and See!

The above was true throughout the period of exile. However, as we stand now on the very threshold of the final Redemption, the message was "updated." Whereas in the past, we had to recognize that our disabilities were challenges, today that does not suffice. Now, we must go to the next step. The emphasis has to be that we want to experience the heightened energies of exile—that are analogous to

the heightened spirituality of the deaf and blind—but without the attendant deafness and blindness. We want the benefits of "deafness" and "blindness" even as our ears and eyes are opened.

Enough with the rationalizations for exile—notwithstanding their inherent truth and inspirational value. Now is the time for us to have our proverbial cake and eat it too! Now is the time to transform deafness into hearing and blindness into sight without losing any of their advantages. Now is the time to place that *aleph* into *golah* and enjoy the best of both worlds.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

THE END OF DECEPTION

Exile is a deception and it robs us of our soul's nutrition.

Anyone with a shred of integrity cannot tolerate staying in exile and with heartfelt passion pleads and indeed demands the Redemption.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

THE END OF DECEPTION

Stealing a Mind

One of the many commandments in this week's parsha, which is replete with Mitzvos, is the prohibition against theft. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 86a), cited by Rashi, points out that the earlier commandment against theft contained within the so-called "Ten Commandments" (in the Book of Exodus-Shemos) actually refers to kidnapping, which is a capital crime akin to murder. In this week's version, the prohibition against theft refers specifically to theft of money or property.

However, according to some authorities, the commandment against theft goes even beyond property crimes. It is also a commandment against certain forms of deception.

Now, the ban on lying is clearly spelled out in the same verse in which the Torah proscribes theft. Why do we need another commandment to outlaw

deception? Moreover, in the earlier section of Mishpatim the Torah states "distance yourself from falsehood." What additional form of deception is meant by the commandment against theft?

The answer is that this particular form of deception does not involve an outright falsehood. Rather it refers to one who elicits unearned gratitude from another. For example, one who wants to ingratiate himself with another without actually having to earn the gratitude invites him or her to his house for a meal knowing that the other would definitely decline. This, the Talmud (*Chullin* 94a) calls "*g'neivas da'as*-theft of one's mind."

Another classic example would be to make a gesture that would naturally be interpreted by the other as intended for his honor where the person had no such intention. The Talmud (codified by Maimonides) describes this scenario:

> "One should not open casks [of wine, supposedly] for his fellow which he must open for sale, in order to deceive him in thinking that they have been opened in his honor."

Deception or Theft? Two Opinions

There is a dispute between the early authorities regarding the nature of this prohibition. According to Maimonides and others it is an extension of the law against uttering a falsehood. Leaving a false impression falls under the rubric of lying.

According to Rashi and others, however, it is an extension of the law of theft. To get another to be indebted to you without truly earning the other's gratitude is the equivalent of receiving something of value without truly paying for it.

What is the practical difference between these two approaches?

We can find the difference in the foregoing case of one who does something for another, such as opening the cask for the purpose of sale, which is misconstrued by the recipient as a gesture of honor or affection. This, as stated, the Talmud forbids.

Suppose we modify this scenario slightly and now the one who opened the cask for sale would have opened it to honor his friend even if he wasn't going to sell it? Perhaps the law that prohibits doing so only applies if the gesture is indeed an empty gesture and the gratitude evoked is unearned. If, however, he truly harbored a sense of deep

admiration and affection for the other, it would not be forbidden although the gesture **at this moment** was not intended to show his affection. The fact that the gesture was not intended to show affection now is mitigated by the fact that the admiration itself is genuine. Hence when the recipient reciprocates it would not be considered unearned and therefore theft.

This conclusion, reached by some, is only valid if we maintain that the prohibition is an extension of the ban against theft. If, however, the reason for the prohibition against "theft of the mind" is the negation of any trace of dishonesty, as Maimonides asserts, it would still be a problem, for then the gesture was not intended for the other; it would lack the imprimatur of honesty.

Torah For all Times

All matters of Torah are directed to each individual on a daily basis. The commandment that prohibits "theft of the mind" and other forms of deception applies to each and every one of us in the most literal sense. We must be scrupulously committed to truth in all our dealings.

However, the Torah also speaks to us as a people and directs its message to each and every period of history. While Torah remains uniform in all times, there is a need to discover a message that is particularly relevant for each period.

Galus: Deception and Theft

Jewish (and, indeed, world) history can be divided into two periods: truth and deception. When the Bais Hamikdash stood, G-d's truth was exposed to view. A Jew could visit the Bais Hamikdash and see G-dly truth face to face. With the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash and the ensuing Galus-exile truth was withdrawn and a time and mindset of deception entered the consciousness of the world. A veil was placed over our collective eyes and prevented us from seeing the true reality of existence.

This cosmic change trickled down to the individual and made it so that honesty and integrity are no longer ours intuitively but high ideals for which we must strive. We, as individuals, are prone to be less than honest in our dealings with G-d, other people and even with ourselves as a result of Galus conditions!

Of course, there are exceptions to this rule which include the *tzadikkim* G-d has "planted" in every generation, who are miniature G-dly sanctuaries. Their presence is required in all times so that we do not lose sight of what has been and what can be and what will be in the final Geulah-Redemption when the veil will be removed. At that time we will **all** see the true reality of existence and translate that realization into a higher level of integrity in our own personal lives.

The Two Related Questions

We can now gain a deeper insight into the Talmud's statement (*Shabbos* 31a) that when our souls come to the heavenly court we will be asked six questions. The first question will be, "have you dealt honestly in your business?" Only later are we asked, "have you anticipated Redemption?" (We will leave the other four questions for another occasion). Why does the question about integrity precede the question about anticipating Redemption?

The answer is that when we pursue honesty and integrity in our daily lives it is a sign that we are preparing ourselves for the Redemption and that we are trying to pierce the veil that covers up Divine

reality. If we would yearn for Redemption but not be honest in our business dealings it would prove that our yearning was not sincere.

The Two Elements of Galus

In light of the earlier discussion of two approaches to "theft of the mind," one may also suggest that Galus brings with it two negative phenomena. Galus is guilty of both deception and theft.

Galus is the source of deception because it does not allow us to be in touch with G-dly reality and even with our real inner selves. As a result of this deception we may gravitate toward evil masquerading as good.

But Galus is not content with leading us astray; it also "robs" our G-dly souls of their needs and desires. If Galus would just cause us to see darkness as light it would be bad enough, but it also obscures the light of the soul and considers it to be darkness, thereby robbing our soul of its ability to edify and elevate us. While the soul thinks it is getting what it needs and shows gratitude, it is truly getting nothing.

Laban and Esau Models of Deception

To help us break out of our Galus addiction to the twin disasters of dissembling about evil and robbing our soul's treasures, we must turn to the Torah. There we can see two models of deceptive individuals, Laban and Esau, who were the very archetypes of deception.

Laban was entirely about deception but at least he did not go as far to feign righteousness. Esau, on the other hand, was compared to the non-kosher pig which stretches out its split hoof (a kosher sign) while hiding its lack of the other kosher requirement (chewing the cud). Esau would try to impress his father Isaac by asking him questions about tithing straw and salt, and he also married a relative, the daughter of Yishmael, even as he kept his other idolatrous wives. All this was intended to impress Isaac with his non-existent piety.

According to the Rebbe's analysis (in *Likkutei Sichos* volume 35, p. 117), Esau's duplicity was more egregious than Laban's, who was no slouch when it came to dishonesty. While Laban was a master of duplicity, he did not try to promote his "virtues." Esau, on the other hand, dishonestly hid his treacherous deeds and impurity even as he sought

unearned admiration from Isaac by flaunting his ostensible righteousness.

The twin vices of Esau—and of our final exile with which our Sages say he is associated—can be said to correspond to the two components of "theft of the mind": deception and theft.

Esau is Salvageable

However, the Rebbe notes that Esau practiced his deception only with Isaac. When dealing with his brother Jacob, Esau made no attempt to hide his hostility.

The Rebbe explains that in truth, Isaac was able to see the hidden good in Esau. Indeed that good ultimately manifested itself with the conversion of his descendants to Judaism, particularly the Talmudic Sages Rabbi Meir, Onkeles, Shmaya, Avtalyon and the prophet Ovadia. Isaac therefore wanted to bless Esau to help him actualize his latent good, which he hoped would neutralize Esau's evil.

Hence, Esau's external show of piety was actually a sign that he possessed a hidden spark of goodness, which only Isaac was empowered to detect and activate.

This, the Rebbe says, can explain what we have been accomplishing during this long period of Galus associated with Esau. We have been slowly and painstakingly extracting the positive energy, paving the way for the future transformation of Esau.

In a much later talk, the Rebbe declared that the refinement of the sparks necessary for the Redemption has been completed. Now our efforts have to be geared to welcoming Moshiach and Redemption into our lives and the lives of our families and communities!

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

RESPONSIBLE, SWEET AND INTERMINGLED

We are commanded to rebuke our fellow. Yet we must not cause sue division amongst ourselves.

Successful rebuking requires love and empathy.

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

RESPONSIBLE, SWEET AND INTERMINGLED

Rebuke!

A major principle of Judaism is the degree to which we are responsible for one another. This principle is expressed by the Torah in several different ways. One of them is found in this week's parsha, Kedoshim:

> "You should not hate your brother in your heart. You should continually rebuke [literally: "Rebuke, you shall rebuke"] your fellow, and do not bear a sin because of him."

This verse establishes the Torah's requirement that we offer words of reproof to our fellow Jews when they have wronged us or otherwise sinned.

However, taking someone to task is not so easy an undertaking. How can one fail to exacerbate the friction between two people by pointing out the other's wrongdoing? Won't that backfire, causing the one rebuked to take umbrage and return the fire?

The Limits

To allay this concern, our Sages added some limits to this obligation:

First, the Talmud states that "just as there is a Mitzvah to tell someone something that he or she will heed, so is it a Mitzvah not to tell someone something he or she will not accept."

A story is told of a rabbi who visited the town's miser. When the honored host asked the rabbi why he had come, the rabbi responded, "I came to do a Mitzvah."

"Which Mitzvah," the miser asked, fearing he would be solicited for a donation to some charitable cause.

"The Mitzvah is for me to come to you and not divulge what I really want because our Sages say that it is a Mitzvah not to tell someone something you know that he won't do, and I know you won't do it" replied the rabbi.

Of course, this piqued the curiosity of the miser and he pressured the rabbi to tell him the purpose of his visit. Only when he promised to do what the rabbi would ask of him did the rabbi "relent" and tell him about the charitable cause to which he was now "forced" to contribute...

Don't Embarrass!

Another qualification of this requirement is not to embarrass the person whom you are rebuking. According to Rashi, this is the meaning of the concluding words of the verse: "and do not bear a sin because of him." What sin is the Torah referring to?

Rashi explains: "Do not embarrass him in public." While you have the right and obligation to rebuke your fellow, do not embarrass or shame him, for if you do you will be carrying a sin because of him.

The rationale for this is twofold:

First, your rebuke will not be effective. Rather than getting the person to heed your reprimand, he or she will be deeply offended and reject out of hand any suggestion to change. It is even likely to anger her or him, which can result in the embarrassed person taking revenge.

Second, it is inherently wrong to embarrass another, and we do not have the right to transgress this principle in order to rebuke another. [According to Rambam, however, there are extreme cases where embarrassment and other strong measures are permitted.]

Another proviso, cited in Tanya (Chapter 32) is that the person whom you rebuke must be someone who shares the same values and commitment to Torah as yourself but who then falters.

Words from the Heart

Another Talmudic saying indicates an additional condition for our rebuke to be in order: "Words that come from the heart will enter the heart." For one's rebuke to be successful in changing the other, one must rebuke with sincerity. It does not suffice to do it only because the Torah commands us to do so.

Indeed, the first person given the express responsibility to rebuke sinners was Noah. Yet, in the 120 years it took him to build the Ark he did not succeed in changing anyone. If he had caused even one person to do Teshuvah (repent and return) that individual would have joined Noah and his family on the Ark.

How could it be that a man whom the Torah describes as righteous failed so miserably in carrying out G-d's command to him?

The Rebbe answers that Noah did exactly everything he was commanded by G-d to do, and that is

precisely how he carried out his mission to rebuke the world. However, he did not empathize with the people whom he rebuked. His words could not penetrate their hardened and resistant hearts.

Rebuke Yourself

Another component of the proper rebuking of another is the need to rebuke oneself first. The Talmud states: "Fix yourself before fixing others." This doesn't mean that one should not try to prevent someone else from committing a crime before performing self-rebuke, for if that were the case, no one would be allowed to rebuke anyone until he himself is sinless. Rather it is intended to drive home the reality that it is exceedingly difficult to influence and inspire others if we do not take our own medicine.

Perhaps one can read the above conditions into the very wording of the command to rebuke by following a literal rendition:

> "Rebuke, you shall rebuke your fellow and do not bear a sin because of him."

In the original Hebrew, the word *es* appears before the words "your fellow." This word is generally left untranslated but sometimes it is translated as "with."

Let us now reread and reinterpret this verse: "When can you rebuke, when you rebuke the one who is **with** your fellow, i.e., yourself." Only when you take your own medicine can you expect to change another's behavior.

Let us perform this exercise once more: "When can you rebuke, when the person you rebuke is one **with** you." It is only when you empathize with the other, feel a kinship and unity with him or her, that you can succeed in touching the other person's heart, which that will then lead him or her to return.

The Three Meanings of Areivim

This sentiment is alluded to in another Talmudic maxim on this topic:

"All of Israel are responsible for one another."

The Hebrew word for responsible is *areivim*. The Rebbe would often quote an interpretation that translates *areivim* two other ways. It can also mean "sweet." Having responsibility for one another does not turn us into policeman who can just shout

orders at strangers. No, our responsibility for one another derives from the love we feel; we are "sweet" to each other. Even when we rebuke, it is done with love and sweetness.

The third translation of *areivim* takes this thought a step further. *Areivim* can also mean "intermingled." All of Israel are intermingled and interconnected. Despite appearances to the contrary, we are not a nation of disparate entities that have come together for certain events and objectives. We are essentially one nation because we are connected to one G-d. Our underlying state is one of sweetness and unity with every other Jew.

Thus, the Ba'al Shem Tov stated that we must love every Jew, even ones we have never met. While love is usually predicated on knowing the object of your love, one can - and deep down does - love every Jew because of our connectedness.

Words of rebuke must come from the heart. If they come from the brain they will fail as no two Jews think alike. The mother of a recently martyred Jew exclaimed in response to the incredible outpouring of solidarity with her family: "Jews are not of one mind but they are of one heart!"

Lag B'omer

The reading of this parsha always coincides with the Holiday of Lag B'Omer, which we observe for two reasons. The first is that thousands of the students of Rabbi Akiva perished in a terrible plague between the Festivals of Pesach and Shavuos. It was on Lag B'Omer that they finally stopped dying. The second reason is that on this day, many years later, the great Sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai left the world in a state of spiritual ecstasy and with his last breath declared this day as his holiday.

What is the connection between these two reasons?

The reason Rabbi Akiva's disciples perished, the Talmud states, is they did not treat each other with respect. They rebuked one another but not in a sweet and loving manner. Since they were not like minded, it poisoned the manner in which they tried to convince others of the correctness of their position. Because they lacked one-heartedness their rebukes triggered a catastrophe.

It may be suggested that the harshness of their punishment derived from the fact that they failed to interpret the word *es* as "with," and rebuked their fellows without empathy. For the students of another teacher that would not have been such an

egregious error. But it was Rabbi Akiva himself who championed the interpretation of *es* as "with." For Rabbi Akiva's own students to miss that point was a far more serious transgression than it would have been for anyone else.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and Moshiach

How does one rectify this situation?

The answer lies in the teachings of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai whose legacy we celebrate on Lag B'Omer. He was a pioneer in revealing the inner dimension of Torah. And it is these teachings, the Zohar states that will lead us to the final Redemption. It is in this dimension of the Torah, especially as explained in Chassidic literature, that we are exposed to our common spiritual anatomy in which all of our souls share a single root.

By studying these teachings we learn to unearth our personalities by removing the surface perspectives which lead to our divisions and discover our true inner unity.

This lesson is particularly relevant now as we stand poised to enter the Messianic Age, when this unity will be external as well as internal. It is important

for us to focus on that unity to pave the way for the future. Whereas in the past promoting Jewish love and unity was primarily a means to undo the cause of our exile, in today's world it is the final step of preparation for the blessed time when we will experience our total unity with the One.

ESSAY TWENTY-FOUR

PARADOXES OF JUDAISM

Judaism is replete with Paradoxes.

Seven of its paradoxes are represented by the seven double Torah portions.

ESSAY TWENTY-FOUR

PARADOXES OF JUDAISM

Double Parsha Phenomenon

Judaism is all about paradoxes. It is a disorganized or perhaps supra-organized)-organized religion. It is a non-religion religion. It focuses on the collective and the individual, to name a few.

It may be suggested that the paradoxical nature of Torah is reflected in the double-parsha phenomenon. Among the fifty-three portions of the Five Books of Moses, there are fourteen that are combined in certain years. The reason for this that since a Jewish calendar year has only about fifty weeks (354, 355, 356 days)—and there are 53 portions—some of them have to be combined to facilitate the completion of the entire Five Books of Moses in the course of a year.

And this week we will be reading two *parshiyos* that have been combined. They are *Acharei-Mos* and *Kedoshim*. More about these two *parshiyos* later.

People often wonder why only certain Torah portions are combined. Why not other combinations?

One possible answer is that, as was just mentioned, most of the double Torah readings appear to have paradoxical names and themes. By combining these readings, our tradition wishes to instill in us the idea that Judaism is all about paradoxes. The challenge of Judaism is to be multifaceted in our pursuit of G-d's will.

Let us illustrate the way six of the seven double portions represent the synthesis of opposites and then examine this week's double parsha as well.

Vayakheil-Pikudei-Collectivism and individuality.

The first double parsha is *Vayakheil-Pikudei* which appears at the end of the Book of Exodus. Its paradoxical nature is glaring:

Vayakheil means "And he gathered," which emphasizes the idea of collectivism and community, whereas the name *Pikudei* means "accounting," which stresses the importance of details and individuality.

Tazria-Metzora. Conception/Life/Vitality and Passivity/Isolation/Death"

The second "twin" Torah portion was last week's parsha: *Tazria-Metzora*.

Tazria means "conceives" which represents the beginning of **life,** whereas *Metzora* is the person afflicted with a skin condition that renders a person ritually unclean. The *Metzora* was quarantined and kept out of the community.

Indeed, the *Metzora* has been regarded by our Sages as if he was dead. This can be attributed to the fact that he was not a part of communal life. These two portions represent the idea of vitality and passivity, both of which are necessary.

Behar-Mountain/Elevated/Pride and Bechokosai-Engraved/Within/Humility

The fourth (the third is this week's parsha which we will discuss later) "doubleheader" is *Behar-Bechukotai*, which means "on the mountain" and "the laws etched in stone," respectively.

A mountain protrudes and is above ground. Things that are etched and engraved are indented and are

beneath the surface. Again, two opposites: pride and humility.

Chukas-Supra Rational/Sublime and Balak/Irrational Hatred

The fifth double parsha is *Chukas-Balak. Chukas* refers to the ultimate supra-rational Divine command, while *Balak* is the name of the Moabite king, who hired Bilam to curse the Jewish nation. Balak was one of the most depraved haters of Israel, whose name has been interpreted to mean "he came to lick the blood of Israel."

Balak's irrational hatred of Jews was the opposite of the Supra-rational commandment discussed in this parsha. This duality suggests that we must even find meaning in the lowest experiences of life, and we must elevate the lowest into the highest.

Matos-Staffs/Rigidity and Masei-Journeies/Fluidity

The sixth doublet is *Matos-Masei. Matos* literally means 'staffs." And it refers to the tribes of Israel who are likened to rigid staffs, whereas *Masei* means "the journeys" expressing the notion of constant change and flexibility.

There are things in life such as our principles and convictions that must never change. Yet a human being must constantly grow from strength to strength.

Nitzavim-Standing and Vayeilech-Traveling.

The seventh and final double parsha is *Netzavim-Vayeilech*. *Nitzvaim* implies standing firmly in one place, whereas *Vayeilech* translates as "And he walked," indicating the very opposite of standing firm.

There are times when we must stand firm and resolute and other times that we must be flexible and yield.

[We must examine the difference bwten Matos and Nitzavim and Masei and Vaeeilecjh since they both contain the lesson of strength, rigidity and flexibility and mobility.

Perhaps, Matos indicates that we can never bend or yield on principles. We never move from our principled positions. Masei indicates that we must constantly be mobile, always looking for ways of growing in our Judaism.

Nitzavim implies standing firm and unwavering in our belief and trust in G-d. Vayeilech suggests that we never relax and retire. Alternatively, one of these two sections implies that when dealing with our relationships with others we should be flexible.

Perhaps, another difference between Masei and Vayeilech is that the former implies travelling **upward** in our spiritual lives. Vayeilech, by contrast implies moving **downward** to bring the knowledge and light to those who are lower than us, just as Moses went to speak to the Jewish people right before he died.]

Acharei-Mos-Kedoshim Doesn't Fit the Mold

Of all the double portions there is one that does not seem to fit into this paradoxical pattern. It is this week's parsha "*Acharei-Mos-Kedoshim*.

The first parsha entitled "Acharei-Mos" means "after the death," referring to the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, Aaron's elder sons who perished because they brought an unauthorized offering at the dedication ceremony of the Sanctuary.

Kedoshim tihyu—the opening words of the second parsha this week—is rendered, "You shall be holy."

At first glance these two names and their themes are not opposites; indeed, they are closely intertwined. Nadav and Avihu's death was caused by their desire to be more holy. They wanted to get closer to G-d. They were ascetics who did not want to be part of this physical existence, and in their zeal to get closer to G-d their souls left their bodies and were reunited with their Creator.

Isn't this synonymous with holiness? Can one whose soul is consumed with a passionate fire for the sublime not be characterized as being holy?

Unconventional Understanding of Holiness

In truth, Judaism's conception of holiness is diametrically opposite the conventional approach and understanding of the term.

To understand this concept, let's present two personalities; the first meditates and prays all day; is oblivious to his surroundings, does not know how to use money etc., and the second is a savvy businessman who is scrupulous in his business dealings, tithes his earnings and sets aside time every day to pray and study some Torah.

If we were to ask people who they think is holier, we can expect most to say that while the second person might be more beneficial to society, the first person is certainly more holy.

Others, sensitive to Jewish values, might demur slightly and maintain that the businessman is also holy in addition to contributing more to G-d's plan for the world. But even these people would concede that on a scale from one to ten, the meditating spiritualist is a ten in terms of holiness, while the businessman might barely eke out a five.

Torah teaches us that the opposite is true. The definition of holiness—or, at least, the Hebrew word *kedushah*—is to be separated, utterly detached. When a person is in a spiritual place—such as in times of prayer and meditation—they are indeed separated from the mundane.

Indeed, the term separation applies more to the person involved with the physical realm.

To explain:

A person is in a spiritual realm he is hardly separated from the physical because they are worlds apart. The true definition of separation is when things are much the same except for a wedge that is placed between them.

To use a simple analogy. While two neighbors can be said to have separated by erecting fence between their properties, it would be ludicrous to state that we are separated from the moon! The more things are similar the more we can be separated.

This view of holiness is captured in the wording of the opening phrase of this week's second parsha:

"**You** shall be holy." If we were to translate this verse more meticulously it would yield: "Introduce holiness **within** the parameters of who **you** are." In other words, the object of being holy is not leaving this worldly existence, even temporarily, but it is to be totally yourself and **simultaneously** being totally holy, apart, detached and other-worldly.

How do We Live the Paradox?

How is this synthesis possible? Aren't these two opposite mindsets? We can understand how one can alternate between the spiritual journey of the soul out of this physical world and then, the process of returning to this world. In Kabbalistic jargon this process is called "*ratzo v'shov*-advance and retreat." But, how is it possible for one to be **simultaneously** in this world and out of it?

The answer is provided for in the conclusion of the verse: "for I am holy."

G-d has no limits. G-d can combine opposites. He can be in this world even as He is above and beyond it. And it is that G-dly power that we also possess that enables us to be G-dly-holy, which means, to soar above the world even as we remain firmly ensconced within it. The businessman while he is fully engaged in his business and follows the Torah laws—that impacts business such as, observing the Shabbat, dealing honestly and with integrity, giving tzedakah etc.—is simultaneously and seamlessly in a higher world.

But the question still persists. How can we compare ourselves, mere mortals, to G-d? For G-d, obviously, it is not difficult to be transcendent and immanent at the same time. But how do we do that?

The answer is provided for in the end of the verse: "I am G-d **your** G-d."

The Torah is essentially saying: You can be holy because I am holy, and that is because: "I am G-d your G-d."

Now, how does that answer the question? Obviously G-d is our G-d, but He is G-d and we are not!

To understand how this answers this question, we must retranslate the words "I am G-d your G-d" just cited: "The original Hebrew is far more nuanced than that, and could yield the following retranslation:

"I, who transcends the parameters of time and space, have become your life-force and inner vitality. I G-d have introduced Myself to you and have become internalized within you."

And if you shall ask, how does this process occur? Is there some type of revelation that takes place when G-d enters us?

How do We become G-dly?

To dispel this notion, the Torah thus continues: "Each person shall revere his mother and father." It is a totally natural process. One does not have to go through a ceremony for it to happen. It is part of the process of birth. As the Talmud teaches: Each one of us has three partners, a father, a mother and G-d. Our parents give us our bodies and G-d infuses it with a divine soul. Therefore, we must have reverence for our parents since they are G-d's partners in our creation. Furthermore, it is through them that G-d enters into this partnership.

And the Torah thus continues: "And observe my Sabbaths, I am G-d your G-d." You must revere your parents because they are My partners. And just as you must revere parents, you must show that you appreciate that there is a third partner. And the most dramatic way to show that is by observing the Shabbat, which is testimony to G-d's role in this world. It would be ludicrous to show recognition to a shareholder in a large corporation and forget about the senior partner who is responsible for all the shareholders involvement.

This is the essence of Judaism: To bring the other-worldly into the world that we inhabit. And it is a process and a union that began at Sinai and will be "consummated" in the Messianic Age.

Maimonides Naturalistic View of the Messianic Age

Maimonides, thus describes the Messianic Age—the age when Judaism vision for an ideal G-dly world will take hold permanently—as a time when there need not be any supernatural changes. He also states that the Moshiach—the Jewish leader who will usher in this age—need not perform miracles to demonstrate that he is the Moshiach. Why is that?

If Moshiach and the Messianic Age hinged on the supernatural, it would negate the whole idea of holiness that is all about the synthesis of the other-worldly with the worldly.

This does not mean that we do not believe in miracles or that miracles will not happen. It certainly does not suggest that miracles that have been performed by G-d in the past were anything but expressions of G-d's power and kindness. Miracles that did defy the laws and conventions of nature were intended for a specific goal, such as saving the Jews, or to jolt us out of our reverie.

Moreover, when miracles do occur the ultimate objective is that they become assimilated into the framework of natural reality. When miracles "fit" in and become part of everyday life they do not negate the purpose of existence; they add spice to it and enhance it.

Judaism can thus be described as the synthesis of the miraculous and the natural.

ESSAY TWENTY-FIVE

HELP THE BLIND

Galus-exile is a time of disrupted Shalom Bayis-Domestic Peace.

It is caused by spiritual blindness.

Moshiach will open our eyes to see the G-dly and goodly in everything and everyone.

ESSAY TWENTY-FIVE

HELP THE BLIND

Who Would Try To Trip a Blind Person?

Blindness is a dreaded impairment. Every civilized society recognized the need to help the blind. It comes, therefore, as a surprise that in this week's Torah portion the Torah finds it necessary to admonish us" Before the blind you shall not place any stumbling blocks."

Who, in his right mind, would get his amusement by watching a blind person stumble over a piece of wood placed in his way? What kind of maniac would do such a dastardly thing and desist because of the Torah's commandment not to do so? In short, why is there a need for such a commandment?

When Does G-d Give Us Commands?

With respect to other commandments, by contrast, where there is a natural inclination to violate, one

needs to be told to overcome the temptation and resist the urge to steal or commit adultery, to cite two common examples. But, to put a stumbling bock before the blind?

It is axiomatic that the Torah only commands us to do things that we would not necessarily have done or desisted from without the Tora's command. Because of our animal nature and evil impulse we are prone to do things that are immoral and have to be told to desist. Likewise, because of our tendency to be lazy we may not do what is right because it goes against our nature. We therefore have to be commanded to do it. But, things that come natural we do not have to be commanded. For example, nowhere does the Torah tell us to breathe, eat, love our children etc.

Figurative Explanation

Our sages, anticipating this question, cite the oral tradition that explains this law figuratively: Do not incorrectly advise an unsuspecting person. Even if the advice is sound and rational for yourself, if it is bad advice for another don't give it.

Alternatively, our sages explain, this commandment is intended to prevent people from causing others to violate the law.

There are people who would never overtly cause any harm to another, because they are concerned with the reaction of others. Many people with malice in their hearts therefore attempt to harm others, but they do it by concealing their real intentions. They sound as if they wish to give helpful advice, knowing that it would be harmful to that individual.

Because this type of evil cannot be detected by other people, the Torah exhorts this individual "And you shall fear G-d." Realize that you cannot hide your intentions, sweet words notwithstanding, from G-d.

Spiritual Blindness

There is yet one more dimension of this commandment. Blindness is also a metaphor for lack of awareness and knowledge. This metaphor has been used Biblically to describe those who do not see G-d's presence in this world and in their lives. Anyone who is objective — and has not been blinded by self interest and other biases — sees Divine providence in all that happens. But there are

those who do not see Divinity in this world because there are stumbling blocks.

A stumbling block is a metaphor for the various objects and ideals that we glorify and deify. For some it is money, for others it is glory and power. Either way they help tarnish our ability to see the reality of existence in an objective and unhampered fashion.

When you see a Jew whose ability to see G-d's presence in this world, is hindered, or if you see people who cannot see the needs of others, because they are so ego-centric, do not put a stumbling block before them. This means do not enhance their misguided sense of ego, but be honest with them. When there are no stumbling blocks and all biases and prejudices are removed, then everyone naturally sees the presence of G-d and the needs of others.

Lighting Shabbos Candles

One of the reasons given by our Sages for the lighting of Shabbos candles is to prevent stumbling over some sticks and stones. Stumbling over them could cause discord in the home and disrupt the cherished Sholom Bayis-domestic peace.

The Rebbe explained that "sticks and stones" are metaphors for all the things that we idolize during the week. Shabbos candle lighting illuminates our homes and our lies and prevents us from spiritual blindness.

Without the light of Shabbos and the ensuing stumbling over the sticks and stones our Shalom Bayis with G-d and others can be undermined.

Messianic Age: Removal of all Stumbling Blocks

The Shabbos candles we light now are a prelude to and model of the ultimate Messianic Age Shabbos. It is characterized as the age when all of these stumbling blocks will be removed, so that each of us can see G-d and each other. When our eyes are open we will see the G-dliness and good in everything and everyone.

This will engender respect and love for one another in consonance with the dictate mentioned in this week's Torah portion: "Love your fellow as yourself." The reason for the disunity in the present period of exile is because the "sticks and stones" are strewn about and we can easily stumble over them.

Moshiach will remove the stumbling blocks to the reality of G-d and His commandments and perfect Shalom Bayis will prevail.

ESSAY TWENTY-SIX

TEMPORARY DENIAL

Asceticism has its place in Jewish thought and life.

However, denial of the physical is at best a preparation for the time when we will "have our cake and eat it too" in the most holy fashion.

ESSAY TWENTY-SIX

TEMPORARY DENIAL

Kosher Produce?

When we speak about the Jewish dietary laws known as Kashrut, one rarely thinks of produce. In truth, the Torah has given us laws that apply not only to meat products but also to agricultural products as well. For example, in this week's parsha, the Torah commands us with the precept not to partake of the first three years of a tree's fruit. This prohibition is called Orlah.

And while the most fundamental reason for this Mitzvah (besides the fact that it is G-d's commandment that needs no rational basis) is the one given for all of the dietary laws and encapsulated in the name of this week's parsha "*Kedoshim*"-holiness.

The way we introduce a G-dly dimension into our lives, and specifically into the eating experience, is by adhering to the Divine prescriptions that regulate

what, when and how we should eat.

Giving up Our Most Cherished Accomplishments

But, this commandment of *Orlah* more particularly imparts a special message concerning the way we become a holy people.

We are naturally fond and protective of the things we produce and create. Of all our creations, we care most for our children. However, this affinity can be extended to one's handiwork as well. Thus, it is natural for one to feel extremely possessive of the fruit of the trees that they toiled to plant and cultivate. Children, in particular, are extremely possessive and loathe surrendering anything they perceive as their own.

When we raise our children, one of the first things we do, is to condition them to share their own goodies with others. At first, the child resists, but with gradual coaxing and reinforcement of positive behavior, the child matures to the point where he or she is happy to share with others. Initially, the child might have to be "bribed" into realizing that there is a payoff for sharing, but eventually the child does it for the right reason.

When we become adults, we do not lose that immature possessiveness. On the contrary, what might look cute or immature in a child becomes ruthless and exploitative for the adult. To counter that attitude and to cultivate the talent for sharing our resources with others, the Torah gave us the commandment to not eat or benefit from the first three years that a tree yields fruit.

By taking away a cherished possession from us, the Torah endeavors to instill within us—or reinforce our innate G-dly tendency—to share our blessings with others.

The Fourth Year Addendum

At this point one could have thought that the prohibition to benefit from the tree's first three years would have sufficed as a powerful lesson. It would have helped to wean us away from our selfish interests.

However, the Torah is not content with this approach. It continues to command us to take the fourth year's yield of fruit and bring it to Jerusalem and consume it there.

One could raise the obvious question: If three years

of desisting from the use of one's first fruits do not suffice to inculcate the lesson of denying one's own possessions as a way to diminish our selfishness, why not have the prohibition continue for one more year? If three years **do** suffice what is the reason for the fourth year's need to bring the produce to Jerusalem?

The End Goal

Upon deeper reflection, we can see the beauty in the unique perspective provided by the Torah.

To deny one from his or her own possessions, might be a necessary tool to mold a responsible and mature individual who cares for others and is not obsessed with his or her own needs. But denial is not an end.

One does not attain holiness—the name of this week's parsha—simply by desisting from enjoying one's fruit. Holiness is a positive concept that comes not by disengaging and denying oneself the pleasures of the world, but by engaging the world and enjoying its benefits in a manner that is suffused with the aura and spirit of Jerusalem.

In simple language, to be holy is to follow up one's

regimen of discipline with a regimen of worldly involvement that is directed towards a noble and G-dly end.

3 and 4

In Kabbalisitc terms the difference between three and four is the difference between a dynamic force that has been launched and transmitted but not yet received and the same force that has already been internalized by the recipient.

When we transmit knowledge or give charity, there are three stages in that transmission.

The first thing is for us to develop the concept in our mind. If it is an intellectual concept one begins with the seminal idea. If it a charitable act one must move away from their own preoccupations and consider the plight of the other.

The second stage is for us to flesh out the idea or the charity and determine the way it can be delivered to another on a different level.

The third stage is when we actually transmit the idea or give the charity to the recipient.

However, the most crucial aspect of this process is stage number four. All of the three stages will prove

futile if the recipient doesn't receive the knowledge or the charity.

This is the difference between the three years of Orlah when we divest ourselves from that which we cherish the most. But the real test if that divestment is meaningful in the long run is when it is implemented within and has an impact on the real world.

The End Days

Speaking of "the end," the Jewish belief in the "End of days" is different from the belief of other philosophies that see an end to the physical world. Nachmanides, the great 13th century sage, writes that the ultimate vision for the ultimate future involves a physical world with all that is physically good.

What distinguishes that future world from the present one is that in today's world there is a dichotomy that exists between the physical and spiritual that necessitates a period of denial to prepare us for the ultimate period of holiness. This is represented by the denial of fruit of the tree for the first three years as a stepping stone to reach the higher level that allows us to eat the fruit in the

holy environment of Jerusalem. In the future Messianic world, we will always be in a "Jerusalem" state of mind, where no dichotomy will prevent us from enjoying an ennobled physical existence.

One may suggest that of the four exiles we have been through, only the fourth and final one will yield the Messianic Age of eternal peace, prosperity, goodness and holiness. The three preceding exiles managed to refine us and cleanse us through the suffering.

Only after this fourth exile will be able to enjoy the fruit of all our labors in exile, with the imminent coming of Moshiach and the true, complete Redemption.

ESSAY TWENTY-SEVEN

DON'T LET THE SODOMITE SALT BLIND OUR OPEN EYES

Blindness comes in many forms.

The most challenging form is when our eyes our wide open with 20-20 vision, yet we fail to see the Divine in everything.

This is the challenge of Galus-exile and will be remedied with Moshiach.

ESSAY TWENTY-SEVEN

DON'T LET THE SODOMITE SALT BLIND OUR OPEN EYES

First and Last Waters

The Torah portion Kedoshim-Holy not surprisingly emphasizes the idea of holiness several times. In one verse (11:44), after discussing some of the laws regarding idolatry, the Torah continues, "And you shall sanctify yourselves and you shall be holy."

The Talmud (Berachos 53b) links these two references to holiness to the two washings of our hands associated with eating bread. The first refers to the "first waters," washing our hands before parting of bread. The basis for this washing is to guarantee that the Kohain could eat Terumah, consecrated food in a state of ritual purity. The rabbis instituted washing our hands to ensure that whenever Terumah is eaten our hands would always be ritually clean.

The second reference to holiness, the Talmud states, is to the "last waters;" the washing of our fingertips at the end of the meal before reciting the *Birchas Hamazon*-Grace after Meals to remove any residual caustic Sodomite salt, which could cause blindness on contact with the eyes.

The question can be asked: what connection do the "first" and "last" washing have with the context of that section which discusses idolatry as Rashi states: "And you shall be holy" means: "separate from idolatry."

We must also understand how the "last waters" is related to the idea of sanctification. While the first waters are intended to render our hands fit to touch consecrated food, how do our Sages justify a health precaution as a form of holiness?

The simple answer is that since it facilitates our ability to recite the Grace after Meals, it too is considered an accessory to holiness

Upon deeper reflection, however, we can find an even more direct relationship between washing the fingertips and holiness.

Two Forms of Blindness

The rationale for the "last waters" washing, as mentioned, is to prevent blindness caused by Sodomite salt.

Blindness can be spiritual. Vision is a function of the brain and not just the eyes. If the brain cannot accurately process something it produces a form of blindness. And, in some ways, a distorted view of an object, person or event, can even be worse than utter blindness. People who think they can see perfectly well are hard to convince of their error and will not seek ways to compensate for their blindness.

To illustrate the above, the Rebbe described a scenario in which a blindfolded person is brought into a room. When the blindfold is removed he sees masked people with knives in their hands ready to stab a captive tied to a bed. His first impression is that these are a gang of murderers about to kill a helpless person. He does not grasp that this is an operating room and the team of surgeons are about to save the life of the unconscious patient.

We may ask, at what point is this person more blind? When he is blindfolded or after the blindfold has been removed? The answer is quite obvious. He

is far more blind **without** the physical blindfold because his understanding of what he sees is the very antithesis of its reality. When he wore the blindfold he was ignorant of the reality but his perception was not skewed against the reality.

From the above we can see that there are two forms of blindness: The first is where we cannot see the reality; the second is where we see the opposite of the reality.

These two forms of blindness exemplify the difference between people who don't see the G-dly reality of everything and those who see the opposite of the G-dly reality.

Knowing and Seeing

Most of us who believe in G-d and know that He is behind everything do not necessarily **see** that reality. If we had eyes to see the true reality we would see Divine Providence in every happening. If only we could see the Divine our lives would be holy to the maximum because everything we did would revolve around the G-dly reality we see and experience.

The difference between knowing and seeing affects every aspect of our lives. If we could see the G-dly reality even the most mundane of activities would be oriented towards G-d and driven by our desire to get closer to Him. Our Animal Soul's passion for the physical would be tempered by our awareness of the Divine within the physical world. The cognitive dissonance between what we know and how we feel and act would disappear.

Getting Rid of Depression

There is a beautiful story of the Mitteler Rebbe (Rabbi Dovber of Lubavitch, the son and successor of R. Schenur Zalman, the Alter Rebbe, the founder of the Chabad movement and the author of the classic work, the Tanya) when he was a child. A group of distinguished Chassidim, two of whom were businessmen in addition to being scholars, were chatting. One Chasid asked his colleagues why they appeared downcast. The Mitteler Rebbe said the reason was obvious and he quoted and reinterpreted a verse in the book of Psalms (115:4):

> "Their idols are but silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have a mouth but

> cannot speak, they have eyes but cannot see. They have ears but cannot hear, they have a noise but cannot smell."

The young Rebbe reinterpreted this Psalm for the Chassidim. The word for "their idols" *atzabeihem* can also be translated as "their depression." And here is how he ingeniously rendered this text:

> "Their depression comes from their distorted view that silver and gold come from human actions and resources. So they can speak words of Torah but the words do not speak to them and influence their attitude. They have eyes but cannot see Divine providence. They have ears but can only pick up the superficial and they therefore have lost their sensitive sense of smell."

"This," the Mitteler Rebbe concluded, "is how an idol is created."

"First Waters": Removal of First "Mild" Form of Blindness

We can now easily appreciate the requirement to wash our hands before partaking of bread and its connection to holiness and the negation of idolatry.

Food is a powerful metaphor for our dependence on and engagement with the physical world. Before we take that "plunge" into the physical we must first get rid of the first form of blindness, where we fail to see the Divine in everything. This we do by washing our hands before the meal.

The hands symbolize our interaction with the physical and they must be elevated to the spiritual realm.

Laxity in this mitzvah, our Sages teach, leads to poverty. In the spiritual sense that means we lack the spiritual capital to live our lives to the fullest.

"Last Waters": Removal of Insidious Blindness

However, there is a more insidious form of blindness. These are the effects of "Sodomite salt," the spiritually caustic substance that comes from

having satiating our physical desires to the fullest. In that state we can develop an even more damaging form of blindness. Just like the evil Sodomites used their "hospitality" toward wayfarers as a way of capturing and torturing them, so too, Sodomite blindness spins our vision around to see in everything the opposite of reality, by worshipping things and pursuing goals that are contrary to G-d.

Two Historical Realities

The "first waters" and "last waters" can be said to reflect two historical realities.

In the days of the Bais Hamikdash (the "first waters") the Kohain's washing of his hands before partaking of Terumah, the consecrated food, symbolized the need to conform our physical activities with our spiritual level. The Temple dispersed G-dly awareness to the entire nation, but the people always had a free will choice to embrace that holiness or resist it. Washing our hands and sanctifying them was our way of saying that we wanted to embrace that which our mind knew so that it informed our entire being.

Washing our hands today before our meal injects us with some of that "first waters" dynamic that prevailed in the days of old and prepare us for the future Third Temple era.

However, as we stand in these last days of exile we are in the "last waters" era. Now there is a more insidious threat to our spiritual lives. Exile, particularly, the last moments of exile, is a period in which people "call evil good, and good evil, that change darkness into light, and light into darkness..." (Isaiah 5:20) The blindness now is of the latter type, where many see a picture that is totally the opposite of the reality with their eyes wide open!

No Blindfold, but Still Blind

Yes, we are like the person whose blindfold has been removed but who cannot see how the surgeons are saving a life.

We are now living in the End Days ("last waters") when G-d has removed the blindfold for us to see G-dliness in the most unfiltered way. We have seen the most unprecedented and open miracles in a taste of the future. Yet, because we have not yet

been given the Third Bais Hamikdash, we can still suffer from Sodomite blindness and see recent events as the opposite of what they truly represent.

Our generation now needs to wash off the residual effects of Galus with the "last waters" in these latter days.

Moshiach is in Sodom!

The Midrash comments on the words in Psalms, " 'I have found My servant David.' Where has he been found? In the city of Sodom."

The Midrash might be alluding to the fact that the last challenge before Moshiach is to get rid of the blinding effects of Galus precisely at the time when our eyes have the capacity to be opened. As the Rebbe told us the only thing left for us is to "open our eyes."

The "last waters" can be said to allude to the teachings of Torah concerning Moshiach, which help remove the potential for our open eyes to see a distorted picture.

Everything can be said to be hinted in the Torah.

The Talmudic expression, מים אחרונים חובה –"The 'last waters' are an obligation" are numerically equal to the words במשיח בן דוד - "with Moshiach ben Dovid."

The implication of this hint is that Moshiach's efforts will be directed at opening our eyes so that we can see G-d's presence in the most revealed fashion.

ESSAY TWENTY-EIGHT

JUDAISM AND THE OCCULT

One of Judaism's many paradoxes is that it is simultaneously the most mystical and most rational belief system.

ESSAY TWENTY-EIGHT

JUDAISM AND THE OCCULT

Odd Conclusion

This week's parsha concludes with the severe punishment that would be meted out to the person who engaged in necromancy; an occult practice that involved communicating with the dead. The very last two Hebrew words read: "*d'meihem bam*" meaning they are responsible for their own demise.

Although it was rare for the punishment to ever be carried out—as is true about most Biblical punishments—nevertheless, the very fact that it is mentioned in the Torah underscores the seriousness of this transgression.

A question has been raised on the choice of this law for the conclusion of the Torah portion:

The fact that the Torah portion concludes on this very harsh note seems to contradict a general rule that when we read the Torah, we should conclude on a positive note. What positive message is to be

derived from the extreme way the Torah condemns the person guilty of these occult practices?

What's Wrong with Magic?

To answer this question we are required to examine the reason the Torah inveighs so heavily against these occult practices. Why are they so harshly condemned?

Furthermore, doesn't Judaism also deal with mystical and spiritual realms such as the teachings of Kabbalah that have always been a part of Jewish teaching?

The answer is that there are at least three fundamental differences between the notion of spirituality as it exists in Judaism and the way it was understood and practiced in other occult religions.

No Independent Existence

First, Judaism—especially as it is expounded in the Kabbalah—is radically monotheistic. Not only do we negate any demigods or forces that possess any independent powers that were not given to them by G-d, but there is nothing that even has independent **existence** outside of G-d.

In stark contrast, the occult ideologies the Torah tells us to distance ourselves from are predicated on the notion that (a) there are many forces in this world, and (b) they can oppose G-d.

Non-Ethical Spirituality

Second, Judaism's notion of G-d and spirituality is that it cannot replace living a moral, pious and ethical life. Moreover, the spiritual achievements are second to following the dictates of the Torah that govern our day to day physical life that includes the way we relate to others. Spirituality is needed to augment, enhance and enliven our Judaism; not to escape from our physical world of responsibility.

The occult religions and practices the Torah prohibits were anything but moral. Many of them were practiced in conjunction with and thrived on despicable acts of human sacrifices and immoral orgies among other unspeakable travesties.

Obsession with Death

Third, while Judaism accentuates life—consistent with the statement in this week's parsha "And you shall live with them"—the occult forces were often

associated with darkness and death. Indeed, as stated, the very subject the Torah discusses at the end of the parsha is necromancy—communication with the dead.

Were the Torah to state merely that it was forbidden to engage in these practices it would not have dramatized the extent to which Judaism repudiates them. By stating emphatically—at the very conclusion of the Torah portion entitled *Kedoshim* that means "Holy"—the Torah wishes to draw the most extreme contrast between the Jewish notion of holiness—and the pagan forms of holiness:

Self-Destructive

The former connects us to G-d's holiness and gives us life, whereas these occult practices lead to the very opposite. The two very last words that declare how that they are at fault for their own demise—*d'meihem* bam—imply that these are the most self-destructive practices.

We are living in the very last throes of the period known as exile—on the threshold of the Messianic Age.

Are You a Superstitious Rationalist?

If you are a non-rational, superstitious person you will believe that nature itself has power to correct its own problems and that the world will somehow come around to becoming a good world.

A non-rational, mindless individual can blindly believe that peace will happen without Divine intervention. That approach is conceptually no more acceptable—in the eyes of the Torah—as those who practice necromancy and other occult exercises. These blind humanistic beliefs are based on ideas and institutions that have no substance and cannot endure on their own. The problem with them is not only they have not passed the test of time; they also deflect our attention from doing the right things; those very things G-d tells us will actually make the world change.

Moshiach the Most Rational Belief

On the other hand, if you are a rational person you will realize that only the one G-d—the sole Creator and Master of the universe—can make the world change and chart the course for us to follow to make it happen. And it is this G-d who chose **us** to

be His instruments of change through the study of Torah and the observance of the Mitzvot.

To be sure, we do **believe with perfect faith** in the coming of Moshiach. As Maimonides, the great rationalist, stated it is one of the 13 fundamental beliefs of Judaism. However this belief is also buttressed by sheer rational logic that G-d will ultimately make good on His promise to bring us Moshiach and the final Redemption and make the world sane again. Believing in Moshiach is not a dream or an illusion. Belief that existence and life has no higher purpose, or that, contrary to G-d's will, that purpose will not be realized—that is the dream and illusion that we must reject.

We also know that the catalyst for the change that will happen imminently is to follow G-d's plan—which is taking every opportunity to do one more Mitzvah. The cumulative effect of all the good that we've performed throughout history might be waiting for one more Mitzvah on our part; the proverbial straw that will break the back of the forces of evil that predominate in the time of exile.

But precisely because we are living in such powerful and momentous times, there is much confusion. All sorts of "spiritual" ideologies are vying for control of

our minds and hearts. Distorted versions of Kabbalah have become popular and have compromised its holiness and integrity in the most vulgar way.

Pseudo-Rational and Pseudo-Scientific Challenges

This is the time that we cannot afford to be misguided by these occult forces. They are no better than the pseudo-rational and pseudo-scientific challenges to G-d and Judaism that we've suffered from, especially in the past few hundred years.

Now is the time to fortify ourselves with genuine Jewish knowledge—of both the exoteric and esoteric parts of Torah—that will prepare us for the Messianic Age.

Now is the time to fuse supra-rational faith with down-to-earth rational thought in preparation for such time when the knowledge of the transcendent G-d will become manifest throughout the world.

Momentous Celebration

This Shabbat, hundreds of thousands of Jews throughout the world will be celebrating a monumental intellectual and spiritual milestone: A

siyum/a celebratory conclusion of the entire encyclopedic work of Maimonides known as Mishneh Torah for the 28th time.

In 1983, the Lubavitcher Rebbe instituted the study of Maimonides' magnum opus that covers the entire spectrum of Jewish law in fourteen volumes, comprising close to 1,000 chapters. By studying three chapters a day one can complete this daunting task in less than a year. For the less ambitious the Rebbe proposed studying one chapter a day thereby completing it in about three years.

What connection is there between Maimonides and the anti-occult message conveyed to us in the end of this week's parsha?

Maimonides the Iconoclast

Of all the great Jewish minds and authorities, Maimonides stands out as the ultimate iconoclast. Maimonides vehemently opposed any form of paganism and the occult because they compromise the pure nature of our belief in one G-d.

Indeed, his Mishneh Torah—which incidentally begins with the Hebrew letter *bet* and concludes with the Hebrew letter *mem*, spelling the world

bam, the very last word of this week's parsha—concludes with the following paragraph:

> **"In that era, there will be neither famine nor war, envy or rivalry, for good will flow in abundance and all delights will be as common as dust. The occupation of the entire world will be solely to know G-d. Therefore the Jews will be great sages and know hidden matters, attaining knowledge of their Creator to the full extent of human potential, as stated [Isaiah 11:9]: 'The world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the sea fills the ocean bed.'"**

The conclusion of this week's parsha is the repudiation of anything that stands in the way of the fulfillment of the Messianic reality outlined by Maimonides. Seen in that light, the conclusion of the parsha is indeed a highly positive one.